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TRIBAL ECONOMY

(An Economic Study of the Baiga)

by

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BHARATIYA ADIMJATI SEVAK SANGH,
Kingsway, DELHI-9.

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Price Rs. 21.00

First Edition 1958

PUBLISHED BY THE BHARATIYA ADIMJATI SEVAK SANGH
KINGSWAY, DELHI-9 AND PRINTED BY D.R. SARDANA AT THE
CAMBRIDGE PRINTING WORKS, KASHMERE GATE, DELHI-6.

To my father

TRIBAL ECONOMY

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FOREWORD

Professor Daya Shankar Nag had submitted a thesis on Tribal Economy for his Ph.D. degree. This is now being published by the Adimjati Sevak Sangh in the form of a book. I welcome this publication of Dr. Nag's thesis on the economy of the Baigas who constitute the tribal population of Madhya Pradesh in the districts of Mandla, Bilaspur, Balaghat, Drug and Jabalpur.

In the course of this thesis on Tribal Economy, Dr. Nag has dealt with all the important aspects of the social and economic life of the Baigas. After describing the physical features of the area and the social life of the Baigas, including their marriage system, festivals, religious beliefs, language and their caste structure, Dr. Nag has narrated in detail the pattern of cultivation followed by the Baigas in the tribal areas. Their methods of sowing in the Bewar type of shifting cultivation and subsequent progress of plough cultivation makes an interesting reading. The book also contains details about the Utera system of double cropping, rotation of crops and manuring, backgarden cultivation, seeds and implements, irrigation etc. in the system of Baiga agriculture. Dr. Nag has devoted one full chapter on the forest economy of the Baigas, including certain details about various by-products including tanning materials, gums and resins, and insect products. Another chapter on tribal handicrafts and their integration with agriculture gives us a good idea about various home and village industries pursued by the Baiga population. Other aspects of the economic life of the Baigas mentioned in this book include marketing and transport, sources and pattern of income, expenditure and standard of living, the drink habit and the methods of borrowing. Dr. Nag has also pointed out how the Baiga economy is being gradually transformed under the stress of modern civilization. Dr. Nag's treatise gives us a wealth of details about the tribal economy of the Baigas which will be of great value to all those who are deeply interested in this subject.

It would be wrong for us to think that tribal economy is essentially primitive in character. In fact, Gandhiji always laid stress on the desirability of preserving the basic characteristics of tribal culture which may prove to be very valuable even in modern civilization. For example, the tribal traits of moral and social discipline, capacity for hard work and dignity of labour, a sense of joy and rhythm in life, community dance and music, stress on self-sufficiency in the essential needs of daily life deserve to be carefully studied by us who call ourselves 'modern'.

It will be a tragedy of the highest order if these fundamental characteristics of tribal economy and sociology are suppressed and transformed into the so-called features of modern culture and civilization. We should surely try to improve the social and economic conditions of the tribal people by giving them the necessary facilities and amenities which are available to other sections of the Indian population. But any attempt on our part to approach the tribal people in a spirit of 'superiority complex' would be highly detrimental and unfortunate.

I do hope that Dr. Nag's thesis would be carefully studied by the students of tribal economy as well as by the different departments of our State Governments. Dr. Nag deserves our warm congratulations for his deep study and hard work in preparing this treatise on a subject which should command our greater attention. In trying to build up a socialist society in India, it is absolutely necessary for us to attend to the needs of the under-developed areas and sections of the population with a sense of urgency. From this point of view, Dr. Nag's thesis will be of immense value.

General Secretary,
All India Congress Committee.

New Delhi,
September 28, 1957.

The Author with two veteran Baigas of Ajgartola village.

PREFACE

The subject of primitive economy has not received as much attention from the economist and the anthropologist as it deserves. Some foreign scholars have studied the economic life of aboriginal people living in the Pacific Islands or the Continent of Africa. But here in India it is almost a virgin field for research. The originality of the subject attracted the author, who, as a teacher of Economics, found it extremely interesting as well as urgent from a social point of view. It took him into dense forests where the basic structure of primitive life has as yet not been severely shaken by modern forces. The aboriginal is simple, honest and hardworking—true to his faith and community. But unregulated culture-contact has stirred the peace of the tribal world. The signs of disintegration and culture-conflict are already visible. The Baiga who numbered about thirtytwo thousand in the old Madhya Pradesh are one of the most primitive tribes of India. The forces of civilisation are pulling down the ramparts of their self-sufficient economy and community life. The tribe has been pushed into an unplanned and uncontrolled transition resulting in complex problems both for the tribals as well as for the civilised. If the process is allowed to continue it will result in the extinction of the tribe and of some of the most important virtues which the tribe has imbibed in the lap of Nature. Hence the social urgency of the subject.

Attractive field studies often prove difficult of achievement. And so it happened. The author had to face academic as well as physical difficulties in his work. The subject of tribal economy belongs to the domain of Economics as well as Anthropology. The apparatus of the modern Science of Economics does not apply to the field in its entirety. Fundamental assumptions of Economics like competition, exchange economy, and mobility of the factors of production are not found in tribal life. Social anthropology also could not help much, because aboriginal's social institutions and customs have been studied with minor reference to their economic activities. Therefore, the author had to take constant care lest the subject may lose its economic reference.

The difficulty was further accentuated by absence of a pattern of research into the primitive economy of any Indian tribe. Almost all the Indian studies are either cultural or anthropological, containing little information on primitive economic life. The author, often had to grope in the dark with regard to the scope and methods of investigation and a correct interpretation of the data collected. Many times emotional tensions had to be kept under check in the interest of detached study, for near starvation conditions of the simple and honest tribals provoked irresistible feelings of compassion. It was really a difficult task to express the pangs of hunger through statistics.

The physical hurdles were equally high. Baigas live in inaccessible forests and on hill tops. The entire tract is infested with carnivorous animals. Sometimes tigers and panthers roam even in the day time near the village. The author had to walk through dense foliage, wade through streams and climb up the hills, sometimes in the night, just to reach the village before dusk. In the southern region of Baigaland even animal transport could not be used because of the steep and slippery ascents and descents. Moreover, ponies and bullocks are a standing invitation to tigers who can smell them miles away. Ten miles was the normal distance which had to be covered on foot every day. A gunman had to be kept closeby, and sometimes fire had to be kept burning during the whole night.to ward off the tiger. Inspite of this care the author had three accidents of meeting tigers; in one case the pack animal had to be wrested from the paws of the tiger. Thus the journey through Baigaland, though prompted by academic considerations, proved a first rate adventure in the Vindhyachal forests.

The author toured through the contiguous areas of the Baigaland namely the tehsils of Mandla, Dindori, Mungeli, Kawardha and Baihar. The tract is shared by four districts—Mandla, Bilaspur, Drug and Balaghat. Geographically Baigaland lies in the southern part of the Lower Nerbudda Valley with the Maikal range as its backbone.

The survey included 2,192 Baigas belonging to 350 families living four districts. It covered the Ryotwari villages and Forest villages, Baigas living in the most isolated villages, Baigas of mixed villages and Baigas of the plains where they have almost merged with the ordinary cultivators. The degrees of acculturisation of the tribe are therefore well reflected in the data collected.

Due to the above mentioned difficulties and the peculiar nature of the subject of research, the four methods of research were used. First of all a background of the subject was obtained by reading books, Government reports, old records and reference literature. In the second stage the author made a preliminary tour of some Baiga villages in order to draw up a questionnaire suited to the problems surveyed. The investigation form included questions on size of family, assets of the family, its income and expenditure, debt position, drink habit and opinion about shifting cultivation. Since Baigas are illiterate and are ignorant the method of direct enquiry did not prove useful. They were collected at evening sittings at which they were persuaded to tell about their life in a story form. Later on, one or two among them (wisest of the lot) were called separately to verify the information collected. The *mukkadum* and *kutwar* were also consulted. The third method on which the author depended most was personal observation. He toured a wide area, studied the family life, discussed controversial topics with the old Baigas, stayed in their homes and was with them at the time of birth, marriage and death, dance and drink. He sojourned in the forests and fields, home and the bazar. This personal experience gave him an insight into the social economy of the tribe and its problems. The author was keen to acquaint himself with others opinion about the Baiga and their future. Therefore, a separate questionnaire was circulated among the officials and non-officials who had lived or are living in Baiga land. The fourth method received good response from the forest officials. In the process of this study, it was discovered that some of the concepts of modern economic science were not satisfactory tools for analysing the problems of tribal economy. He had to evolve new concepts that are descriptive of tribal realities. Such new concepts are mentioned in the following chapters in their appropriate context.

The problems of bond-service and economic servitude have been excluded from the study. The reasons are : Most of Baigas live in the interior parts where other cultivators and land owning classes do not reside. Besides, Baigas avoid farm employment as far as they can. The cultivators also do not like to engage them, for Baigas dislike continuous work. Because of the same reason the *sahukar* is not keen on employing him as a farm labourer or domestic servant. The survey of 350 families revealed that hardly two persons were engaged as farm workers. The question of alienation of land from the Baiga to the non-Baiga population has also been excluded from this study. In the case of Baigas living in Forest villages (administered by the Forest Department) it is the Government and not the cultivator who owns the land. Therefore, the question of mortgage or transfer of land by a Baiga cultivator does not arise. In the *Ryotwari* villages also Baigas are cultivator-tenants.

Primitive economics, generally speaking, lacks in precision and statistical accuracy. Anthropological studies contain very meagre data on economic activities of the primitives. On the whole the anthropologist has been more interested in examining the social correlates of economic institutions than in examining the more specific economic implications of the data themselves. Statistics are not brought into relation with the quantity of resources available, there are few studies of the volume of production, labour supply, or the quantities of goods accumulated for the furthering of future production. The present lack of a well-constructed bridge between anthropology and economics helps to explain why, inspite of the great developments in the theory and methods of both, the concrete achievements in primitive economics have not been greater. The limited period which other field workers have had for observation is also partly responsible for comparatively less statistical certainty in primitive economics. Further, in the absence of any extensive body of true historical data the primitive economist has hardly any chance of making a comparative study. Conseqently the studies of primitive economics, though empirical, are qualitative rather than quantitative.* The author suffered from all the above handicaps in his study of the Baiga economy. In addition, Baigas are illiterate and unacquainted with modern economic life. They could rarely give accurate facts and figures about their income and expenditure. It was difficult for them to calculate in terms of exchange economy. Even for counting the number of members of their family they collected pebbles, one pebble representing one person. Further, they are a shy people, afraid until recently of enquiries by outsiders who have been money-lenders or Government officials. Lack of official statistics about the aboriginal of Madhya Pradesh further made the task difficult. Not a single economic study of any of its tribes was available for the comparison of background material. In view of the climatic difficulties and the risks of forest life it was not possible for the author to stay in Baigaland for a longer period, stretching to a year or so, and to collect information about different phases of Baiga life. Again, predominance of kind economy introduced complications in estimating the money equivalents of commodities produced or exchanged. Above all, the effects of non-economic factors on Baiga's economic activities could hardly be assessed in terms of money. The author, therefore, does not claim that the respondents were able to give him more than statistical approximations of their own economic affairs. His conclusions indicate the main trends of Baiga's economic life. They represent only the broad contours; the accurate details of the map of Baiga economy are yet to be filled up by one who is prepared to spend a long span of his life among the Baigas.

The author expresses his deep gratitude to Shri Shriman Narayanji, General Secretary, All India Congress Committee, for his affectionate

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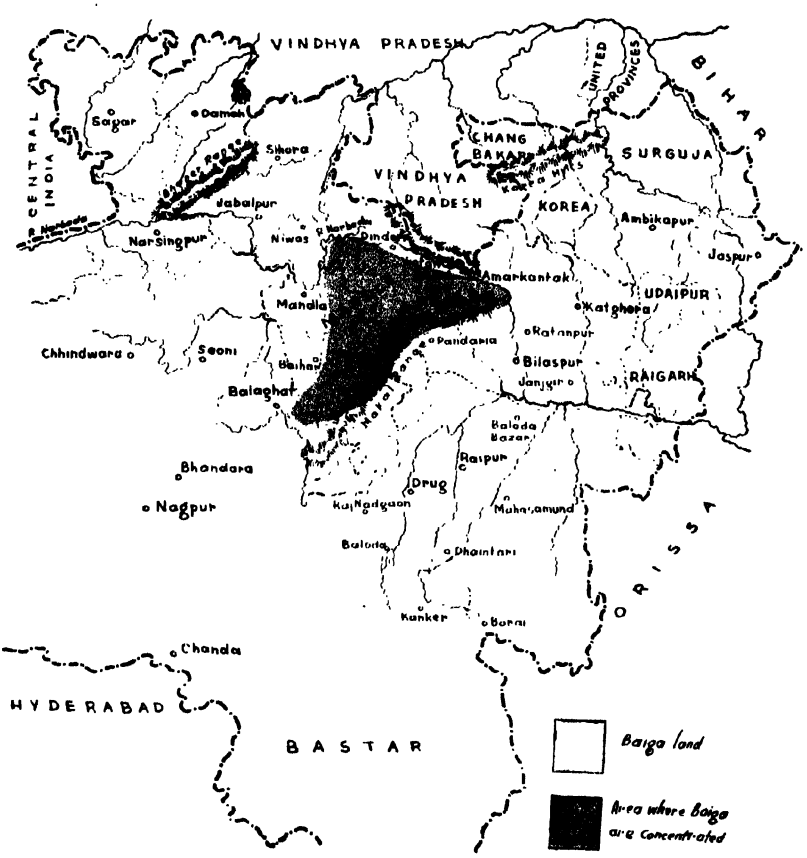
*See R. Firth : 'Primitive Polynesian Economy', Chapter on Problems of Primitive Economics.
'Primitive Economics of Newzealand Maori', Chapter 14.
B. Malinowski: 'Primitive Economics of Trobrain Islander' and in Economic Journal (31), 1921.
Thurnwald 'Economics in Primitive Communities', Pp. 105-106.

guidance, continuous interest and encouragement in not only author's research work but in his whole career. Lt. Col. K. P. Bhatnagar, Vice-Chancellor, Agra University, an old teacher of the author, supervised the research and inspired the author with his words of affection. The author is indebted to him for his veteran guidance and blessings. Dr. Verrier Elwin, anthropologist of world repute, from whom the author received encouragement and help right from the very beginning of his work, obliged the author by providing some rare literature, invaluable experience and a bold vision of the tribal problem. His literary friendship proved a sort of bridge between anthropology and economics. Dr. H.H. Presler, Director, Department of Organised Research, Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur, was kind enough to go through the thesis and make realistic suggestions.

The author is also grateful to Shri L.M. Shrikant, Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Government of India, New Delhi, and Vice-President of the Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh, for approving the thesis for publication. Shri P.G. Vanikkar, Honorary, Organiser Tribal Welfare, Government of Madhya Pradesh, helped the author by supplying necessary information and veteran advice. Shri D. Rangaiya, Working Secretary, Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh rendered immense help in expediting the publication of the book and in encouraging the writer. Shri N.V. Bapat, Joint Secretary, Banvasi Seva Mandal, Chhindwara, M.P.. inspired the author by his personal example of deep love and unflickering faith in tribals' future. He sustained the writer's enthusiasm in his work in the midst of various difficulties.

But for the cheerful company, helping hand and voluntary interest of the author's two old students Shri Sobha Singh Thakur and Shri J.P. Namdeo his task would have floundered in difficulties and doubled in terms of stress and strain.

Map showing Baigaland and area where Baigas are concentrated.



CHAPTER I

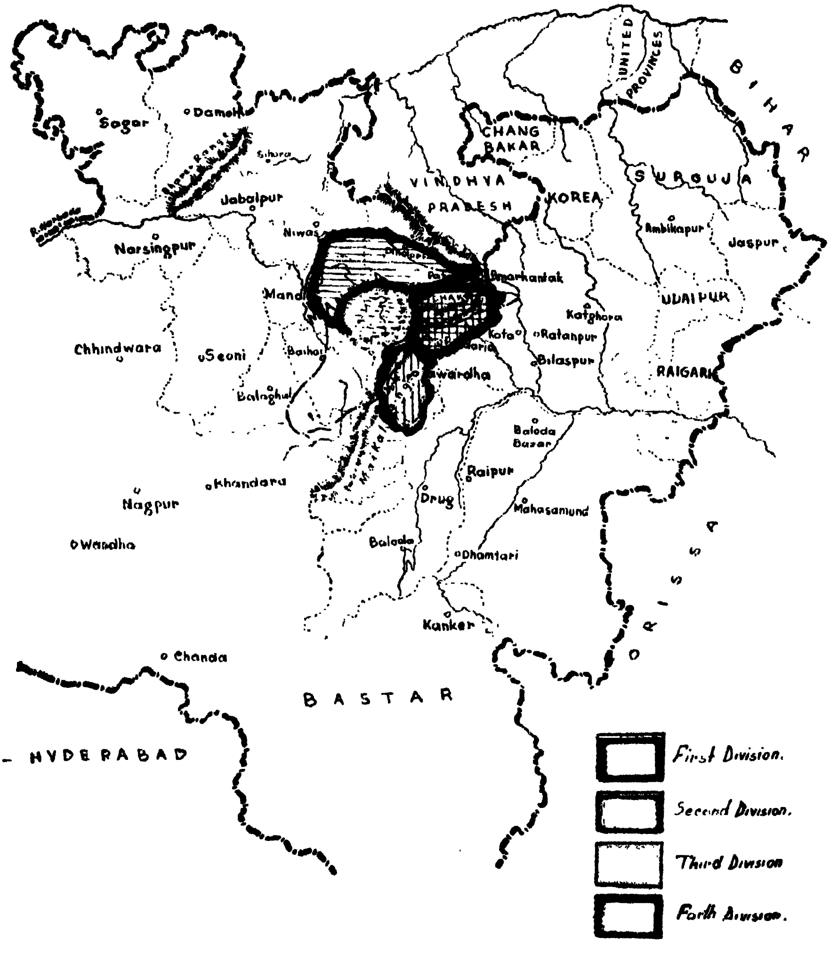
THE PHYSICAL BACKGROUND

The catchment of the Nerbudda and its tributaries with Maikal range at the bottom is the real home of the Baiga. The area is shared by five districts—Mandla, Bilaspur, Balaghat, Drug and Jabalpur. But Baigas are not spread all over the districts. They reside in forest covered hilly tracts. Their preference for isolated places has carved out a region comprising tehsils of Dindori, Mandla, Mungeli, Kawardha, Baihar and Katni with Dindori tehsil as the main concentration of the tribe. The region has the shape of a human foot. Let the toe ascend over three thousand feet high southern hills of the Amarkantak and the heel fall on Nerbudda where Silgi joins it and the ankle rest on the Saletekri hills in Baihar tehsil, the foot is complete. The Northern boundary of the region is guarded by the Nerbudda beginning from Amarkantak until it takes a southward course at Silgi junction. Irregular hillocks, forests and plains between Mandla and Baihar form the Western line. Saletekri hills of Baihar tehsil provide the southern base which stretches through Maikal range and joins the Eastern boundary at Amarkantak. The tribe is concentrated in certain tehsils which roughly form the political boundary of the Baiga region. Mungeli of Bilaspur, Dindori and Mandla of Mandla District, Kawardha of Drug and Baihar of Balaghat District form a compact area where Baigas have made their home. From the administrative point of view, on the East lie the Bilaspur and Bemetra tehsils, Raigarh and Balaghat in the South-West, while Lakhnadon and Niwas tehsils form the North-Western frontier. The Northern line over which the Nerbudda flows is a common boundary between Vindhya Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Thus the Baiga Region lies between longitude 21°.5′ and 23° East and latitude 80°.5′ and 82° North.

The Region can be roughly divided into four physical divisions. The first division in which the largest number of Baigas reside, stretches along the Maikal range from Chauradadar in the East to Motinala hills in the South-West. The tangled confusion of peaks and ranges of the Maikal hills divide the face of the country into a number of valleys and tablelands which, gradually increasing in height from South-West to East, culminate at last in the plateau of Chauradadar and form a barrier between the highlands of Raigarh-Bicchia and the lowlands of Chattisgarh. The second division is the highland of Saletekri which gradually slopes down towards the central plains of the Baiga Region. The tract is partly hilly and partly tilted giving an appearance of a plank inclined towards the heart of Mandla District. The Central part, which is less rugged and irregular, forms the third division. It is a cob-web of rivers and streams all draining into the great Nerbudda. Fertile valleys and wild vegetation of the Region give it an appearance of Nature's garden. The rising ranges of Satpura hills open the fourth division in which about three thousand Baigas have found shelter.

The Region is a peculiarly diversified country, including all types of land from the rich level rice and wheat tracts near Mandla and Baihar, to the rugged and barren uplands of the Maikal range. The tract exhibits all stages of progress from developed cultivation of rice and wheat to crude axe-cultivation. The extreme upper valley of the Nerbudda is an undulating and treeless plain, broken up by flat-topped hillocks. A long spur of the Amarkantak hills running out West for over forty miles, separates this from the fertile but narrow and backward valley of the Kharmer. South of the Kharmer Valley is a long and rugged strip of fine Sal jungle containing the Baiga Reservation on a fine plateau as high as Pachmarhi. South of Dindori and East of Mandla are grass lands of Raigarh-Bicchia, an undeveloped tract of some fertility. Here development is retarded by the undeservedly evil reputation of the country, and the sparseness of tribal population. The tract is spotted with several isolated blocks of Sal and other jungle, and traversed by the rocky Burner and Halon rivers. On the South and West it is bounded by the extensive and beautiful Sal jungles of the Banjar and Phan valleys. The Eastern part of the Baiga Region which lies in Mungeli and Kawardha tehsils is covered by the Maikal range running from North-East to South-West, from the peak of Amarkantak in Vindhya Pradesh to the Saletekri hills of Balaghat. The Northern tract of the Mungeli tehsil is rocky and very poor in fertility. Since most of the rivers, including Maniari, Agar, Hanp and Phonk, flow from North to South-East, the Northern parts are dry and barren. The Baiga villages of Kawardha tehsil are in no way better situated. Spot observation revealed that here Baigas fell forest for cultivation practically every year, as a forest patch does not give even two crops due to poor vegetation. This unfertile and inhospitable tract has projected into the plateau of Eastern Baihar and onwards to the Saletekri. In Baihar the plain, though wide and open, is much cut up by jungle-clad ridges, and is itself steeply sloping so as to render tank construction and rice cultivation difficult. The Saletekri area is the most rugged and stony track with poor forest growth (as fires prevent any of the more valuable trees from coming to maturity). Water is scarce. Hills and valleys are perhaps the most lonely, inhospitable and tiger-haunted spots in Balaghat district.

Map Showing Natural Divisions of Baiga land



The Maikal hills are the backbone of the Baiga Region. The range of hills lying between 21°11′ and 22°40′ N. and 80°46′ and 81°46 E. is the connecting link between the great hill systems of the Vindhyas and Satpuras, forming respectively the Northern and Southern walls of the Nerbudda Valley. Starting in the old Khairagarh State, the range runs in a general South-easterly direction for the first 46 miles crossing the Bilaspur district from South-West to North-East at the border, and then entering the Sohagpur pargana of old Rewah State, terminating 84 miles further on at Amarkantak, one of the most sacred places in India, where the source of the Nerbudda river is situated. Unlike the two great ranges which it connects, the Maikal forms a broad plateau of 880 square miles in extent, mostly forest country inhabitated by aboriginals. The elevation of the range does not ordinarily exceed 2000 feet, but the Lapha hill, which is a detached peak belonging to it, rises to 3500 feet. The range is best known for the magnificent forests of Sal (Shorea robusta) which clothe its heights in many places. The hills are mentioned in ancient Hindu scriptures as the place of Maikal Rishi's penance, though Vyasa, Bhrigu, Agastya, and other sages are also credited with having meditated in these forests. The greatest claim to sanctity lies, however, in the presence upon them of the sources of the Nerbudda and Son rivers. The Markandeya Puran relates how, when Siva called successively on all the mountains of India to find a home for the Nerbudda, only Maikal offered to receive her, thus gaining undying fame; hence the Nerbudda is often called Maikal-Kanya or 'daughter of Maikal'.*

The Eastern part of the Baiga Region, which lies partly in the Mungeli and partly in the Dindori tehsil, is studded with hill ranges which run along the whole plain, sometimes thrusting forth an arm or throwing out an isolated peak, and then advancing boldly into the level country, sometimes receding into deep hollows and bays usually covered with luxuriant vegetation. Dindori tehsil, the heart of the Baiga Region, is a cobweb of peaks of the Maikal hills. These spurs and ranges, known by different local names, divide the face of the country into a number of valleys and tablelands, which, gradually increasing in height from West to East, culminate at last in the plateau of Amarkantak. The principal minor ranges are the Jagmandal, a high and well defined forest running from North to South. Further East lies a multitude of unnamed spurs and bluffs, which run North to the Nerbudda and furrow the country into a series of small and fertile valleys. After giving birth to the Nerbudda, the main range takes a bold sweep round to the North-West forming the Northern boundary of the Baiga Region. West of the Banjar river a low spur of the Eastern Satpuras runs East from the Seoni border until, at Amjhar, it turns North and forms the water shed between the Wainganga system on the West and Banjar system on the East. Northwards of Mandla town there is a general rise in elevation culminating in the rugged tableland of Mokas, which divides the Mandla and Jabalpur Hawelis (plains), the Nerbudda and Gangetic river systems.

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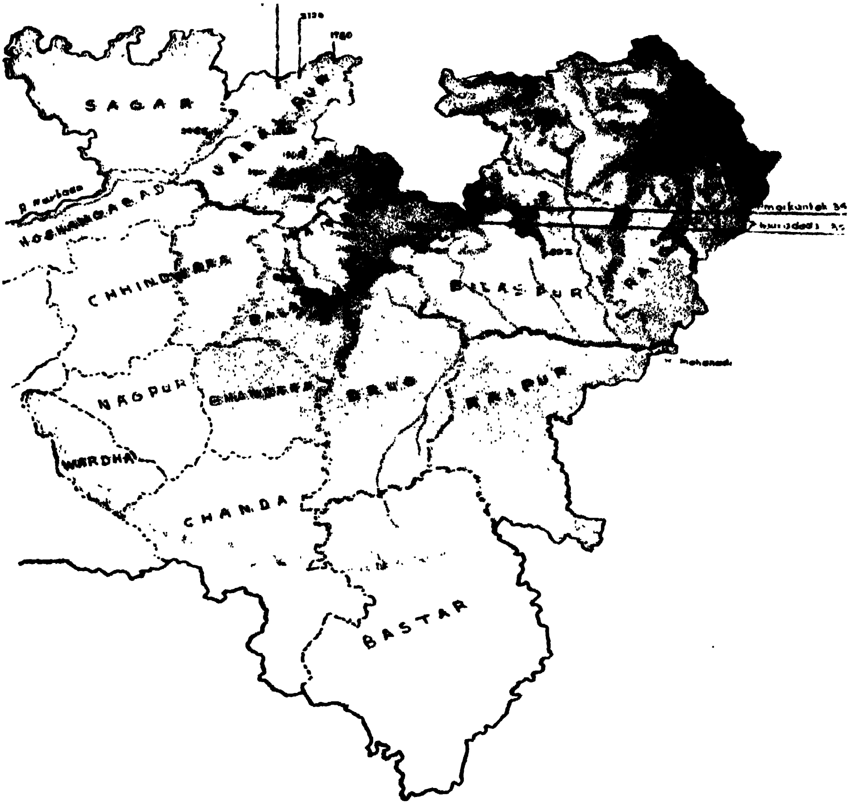
* See Mandla District Gazetteer, Volume A, p. 253.

Saletekri is the South-Western end of the Maikal range. It is a high, but flat plateau with an appearance of barrenness and inhospitality. Small peaks and hollows break the monotony of an unending tableland here and there. The high tableland of Tipagarh (2761 feet) divides the valley of Banjar, a confluent of the Nerbudda, from that of the Nahara and Uskal, which run into the Wainganga, and thus forms part of the Central Watershed of India.

The hill ranges of the Region exercise a significant influence on the river system of the area. Maikal hills slope from East to South-West and most of their spurs also follow the same direction. As a result, the entire watershed is drained out by rivers flowing from East to West in a meandering course, interrupted by changing elevations. The principal river, Nerbudda, takes a westward course and attracts all its tributaries, namely, Kharmer, Burnher, Halon and Banjar through North-West routes. Consequently the entire rainfall is ultimately drained into the great Nerbudda. But it need not be imagined that the westward course of rivers is smooth or navigable. Spurs and sub-ranges of Maikal hills stand as obstacles in the channels and the rivers have to fight their way out of these ranges. It is really thrilling to see, particularly during the rainy season, gushing streams dashing against rocks and ravines—a battle royal between liquid and solid.

Since the Baiga Region is a hilly tract, its elevation is very irregular. Peaks and ravines, hillocks and hollows render the whole area uneven—a chain of small plains and rising hills. The Katha hills, 6 miles North-East of Lormi in the Eastern corner of the region, stand as 2280 ft. high sentinel above the sea level. Lormi, Lilapur, Setganga and Dasrangpur, other peaks in the neighbourhood, have elevations of 1114, 1015, 985 and 999 feet respectively. The North-Eastern portion of Bilaspur District (which forms the Eastern part of the Baiga Region) is wild and hilly. The prominent elevations are Gidhoora 2853, Makua 2775, Matin 2315, Kekril 2826, Palma 3431, and Dhitori 3041 feet near Laphagarh. In the Western tract the hill station of Lilavani attains 3696 ft., the highest point in the whole District of Bilaspur. The Chhuighat and Kundwani peaks, which connect the Baiga villages with

RELIEF MAP OF BAIGALAND.



the mainland of the Baiga Region, rise three thousand feet above the sea level.

The elevation of the Mandla District, in which lies the major part of the Baiga Region, varies from 1345 feet above sea level at Cheolia (where the Nerbudda turns towards Jubbulpore) to 3454 feet, the top of an isolated hill near Baiharpur in the East of Dindori tehsil. Leaving the banks of the Nerbudda and Banjar rivers and the Haweli and Pathar tracts, the general elevation of the district is from 1800 to 2400 feet. The tablelands of Pathar and Haweli are between 1400 and 1500 feet high, while the Raigarh-Bicchia plateau varies from 1800 to 2100 feet. The elevation, however, reaches its peak height at the Chauradadar plateau, the Eastern most part of the District, which averages over 3000 feet. The extreme upper valley of the Nerbudda which forms the northern boundary of the Region has an average elevation of 2550 feet.

The southern part of the Baiga Region situated in the Kawardha and Baihar tehsils is again hilly, interrupted by small plains in the river valleys of Halon, Banjar and Son. North of the Banjar valley is the Bhaisanghat, a line of hills running South-South-East right through the Baihar tehsil and the upper plateau of the Kawardha State, to where the Maikal range descends into the Chattisgarh plain. The surface is very undulating. Near Topla there are two high and precipitous hills, 2700 and 2900 feet in height. A long, steep ridge separates the tract from the Mandla district. Saletekri, as the name indicates, is a tableland in the Southern most part of the Baiga Region. It lies above the ghats and occupies the upper portion of the Banjar valley. But the lower tract, known as Bijagarh, is separated from Saletekri by the rocky and forest clad hills that enclose the valley of the Son and of its chief tributary the Tanda.

The topography of the region can best be described in the words of Forsyth, who was the first Englishman to have probed into the mysterious Maikal range about 82 years ago. One 'will find himself in a region where all is chaos to the unguided traveller; where hill after hill of the same wild and undefined character are piled together; where the streams appear to run in all directions at once; and it will not be until he has traversed the whole region, or closely studied a map, that some method will begin to evolve itself, and the geography became plain. He will find that at a height of about 1000 feet above the plain (about 2000 feet above the sea), the hills have a tendency to spread out in the form of a plateau, some comprising the top of only one hill and a small area, other a group of many hills, which support, like buttresses on their summits, large level or undulating plains. From there again he will find shooting up still higher a good many other solitary flat- topped hills reaching the height of nearly 3500 feet, some of which in like manner unite into a plateau at about the same elevation. Yet higher than these, but never assuming the character of plateau he will see here and there a peak rising to nearly 5000 feet above the sea'.*

Rivers

The Maikal range divides the river system of the Baiga Region into two parts. Some streams roll down from the Amarkantak plateau in the South-East direction, while others take a swift course towards the West. Among the principal streams which saturate the eastern tract of the Region are : Arpa, Maniari, Agar and Hanp. All these rivers originate on the slopes of the Maikal hills and flow towards the East, ultimately joining the Mahanadi at different junctions. The Arpa rises on the Pendra plateau and after a long and picturesque course through wooded hills and valleys, enters the plain of Bilaspur, and skirting Bilaspur town falls into the Sheonath near Bartori. Maniari river rises in the Lormi hills, and flowing South and West through Lormi past the villages of Lormi and Takhatpur, separates the Bilaspur and Mungeli tehsils for a considerable distance. After a circuitous course of about 70 miles it falls into the Sheonath river in the Tarenga estate about two miles from Dighori. The Maniari has a wide straggling bed, but except at intervals in the rains, contains no volume of water. In the hot and cold weather months many parts of its channel are quite dry, while in other places there are reaches of water, which are utilised sometimes for irrigation. Agar, an important tributary of Maniari, rises in the Maikal range in the North of Pandaria zamindari and flows South and East through that zamindari and the Mungeli tehsil until it joins the Maniari near Kukusda. The town of Mungeli is situated on the Agar. Another stream (known as Hanp) also rolls down from the hills of Pandaria zamindari on the border of the Mandla district. After traversing the Mungeli tehsil to the South the Hanp enters the Bemtara tehsil of Durg district and joins the Sheonath near Tarpongi about three miles West of Nandghat. The total length of the river is about 80 miles.

The catchment of the great Nerbudda gives an appearance of a spiders' web spread by nature all over the Baigaland. Innumerable streams, rivulets, nullah and rivers, are the water arteries which irrigate the vast forests throughout the year. "The Nerbudda is the guardian deity of the Mandla District and among Indian rivers is second in sanctity only to the Ganges. On the forest clad slopes of Amarkantak (Vindhya Pradesh) it issues from a tank and after a three mile course touches the Madhya Pradesh territory at the famous falls of Kapildhara.

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*Forsyth : "The Highlands of Central India" p. 3, (1919 edition, Chapman & Hall Ltd., London.)

The stream flows North-West, marking the boundary between Mandla and Sohagpur, until after a winding course of fifty miles it turns sharply to the West towards the tehsil town of Dindori. As soon as the Dindori plain is passed it wanders through a tangled maze of country, at one time cramped between lofty precipices, at another gliding gently through a fertile valley. About ten miles South-East of Niwas its course takes a sudden turn southward, flowing past Sid Baba and Ramnagar to Mandla town, thence forward it flows north and west, keeping to the south of Lakhanpur tract and leaving the district at Singai. Nowhere the river is navigable except for the ten mile reach between Ramnagar and the town of Mandla, and even timber-floating is difficult owing to numerous rapids and the large rocks that stud the stream. Just below Mandla are the much fabled Sahashradhara—Thousand Arm Rapids. At this point the river is nearly a mile in breadth, and with the boiling rapids above and the forest-clad slopes below presents a view of really extraordinary beauty."*

Among the important tributaries of the Nerbudda the first to join it is the Seoni river—on the banks of which the great anthropologist, Dr. Verrier Elwin, has settled near Gorakhpur village. The river rises on the North-Western slopes of the Maikal slopes and drains the area during the rains. Among other southern tributaries may be mentioned the Machrar, Chakrar and Tar, all rising from the Maikal slopes. To the North the most important are the Silgi and Kanai, which rise in the mountainous country around Shahpur. Kharmer river—last among the Southern tributaries to join the Nerbudda before it takes a turn towards South—rises near Kutela-Mugdara in Dindori tehsil and flows westward for thirtyfive miles along a narrow, fertile valley and joins the Nerbudda at Keolari. The Burhner which flows west from the Baiga chak and after being joined at Ghungri by the Halon, the chief river of Raigarh-Bicchia plain, empties its waters into the Nerbudda in the sacred precincts of Deogaon. Both the rivers have deep rocky beds which do not permit irrigation except in the valleys. Among the tributaries of the Nerbudda, Banjar drains the greatest volume of water. It rises in the Gandai Zamindari in Balaghat District and flows at first between banks studded with willows (Salix tetrasperma) and Jamun trees through the black soil plains of the Saletekri and Gandai Zamindaris. Lower down it forms the boundary of the Balaghat district and the Kawardha tehsil of the Drug District. Flowing northwards it forces its way over the curiously coloured rocks of the Kharradhar barrier, and thence, fringed with the succession of Sal groves, it flows westward in a winding course till it meets the Jamunia at Bhimlat. Its course from this point is mostly north, through almost uninterrupted Sal forests, till it leaves the Balaghat district at Narna. Banjar finally joins the Nerbudda at Mandla. Like its two main tributaries, the Sulkum or Surpang and the Matiari, it has a sandy bed throughout and the soft banks of all the three are suited to the hollowing out of the half-wells watering the numerous sugarcane gardens studding their banks. The sudden floods to which Banjar is subject render irrigation from it difficult.

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*Mandla District Gazetteer, Volume A, p. 253-254.

Rainfall

The forest-clad hills of Baigaland are the favoured host of monsoons every year. The Mandla District in which nearly 80 per cent of the Baiga population lives, receives an average annual rainfall to the extent of 56.1 inches. But these heavy rains need not give us the impression that rains are uniform all over the Region, every year, or through every season of the year. It definitely rains more over lofty hills and dense forests than in the plains or tablelands. For example, Saletekri and Sonwani hills receive heavier rainfall than the plains of Lanji and Katangi just below the hills. Similarly the rains are more heavy and continuous on the Amarkantak plateau than in Raigarh-Bicchia plain or the upper-Nerbudda valley. The rainfall is considerably heavier on the forest-clad plateau of the Pandaria, Lormi and Pendra in the Bilaspur District, but the plains of Mungeli and Kateli receive such scanty rains that the Agar and Maniari dry up at many places a few months after the monsoons. The Region does not get even approximately uniform rainfall every year. In some years it rains quite heavily so as to cause floods, while in others rains are inadequate for a successful crop. Out of 53 years, the rains were inadequate (below the average of 56") for 14 years, just sufficient for 30 years and caused a condition of flood for 9 years. The following table shows the variations in the average rainfall in the Mandla District :—

Rainfall in inches.	Number of years.	
Below 30	1	Period of indequate rains
Below 40	2	
Below 50	11	
Below 60	19	Period of sufficient rains
Below 70	11	
Below 80	9	Floods
	53	

Rainfall lacks uniformity not only over a long period of years but also during the same year. Rains are heavy in the early and mid monsoon, but they are irregular and scanty in the later period. On average both Mandla and Dindori receive practically the same amount of rain, but the distribution is somewhat different, the later rains in Dindori tehsil being the heavier. The following figures indicate the nature of monsoon in Mandla District during different parts of the year :

AVERAGE RAINFALL IN MANDLA DISTRICT, 1941-1946.

Early Monsoon	43.10 inches
Late Monsoon	8.11 inches
Cold weather	4.60 inches
Hot weather	1.10 inches

Climate

The Baiga Region extends upto the highest plateaus of the Satpuras and Maikal hills, ranging from 1500 to 2500 feet above sea-level. In comparison with the low-lying plains of Jabalpur and Raipur in the North and South respectively, it is cool and exhilarating. The immediate proximity of extensive, green and well watered jungle tends to reduce temperature. There are many spots surrounded by hills and jungles, such as Supkhar in Baihar, Motinala, Kanha and Gaura-Kanhari in Mandla and Piparia and Jalda Baona in Dindori tehsil whose climate can compare favourably with Pachmarhi. In the hottest days of the hot weather the thermometer seldom registers more than 105 degrees in the shade, except in the denuded plains where it goes as high as 112. In the plains the hot winds blow from the middle of April to the middle of June and the heat, at times, is very trying. But occasional thunderstorms are obtained and afford a cool day now and again. During the nights throughout the hot weather there is usually a light cool breeze. However, the Baigas, who mostly live in deep forests or on high tablelands, escape the rigors of hot weather. Like antelope and deer they choose closely wooded grooves near some everflowing stream. The rainy season is extremely unhealthy. Rains are continuous and heavy, sometimes for more than a fortnight. All valleys and nullahs ooze with water, villages are cut off from the outside world, and the surroundings stink with rotton leaves and cow and pig dung. Although temperature is low in the rains the dampness produces sensations of enervation of discomfort. The rigor of the cold weather in these upland jungles is extreme. During the cold weather months (November to February) a very heavy dew falls, and in

December and January there are occasional severe frosts, the thermometer frequently falling as low as 22 degrees Fahrenheit. Young trees, unless well shaded by other vegetation, are cut down by frost year after year. Frosts are, however, not common in the plains, though some of the more delicate crops (such as popat) occasionally suffer in this way if growing near the hills.

Some special features of the Baiga Region in respect of climate may be recapitulated. Monsoons in this region break out about a fortnight earlier than in the plains say in the second week of June. Rainfall is as high as 56 to 58 inches in the forest areas particularly over the high peaks of the Maikal hills. Cold weather is extreme, accompanied with frequent frosts and heavy dew falls. But dense vegetation and high altitude do not permit the temperature to rise above 105-106 degrees during the summer. The climate has influenced crops, forest growth, wild animals and living conditions to a considerable extent. In fact, the climatic factors have shaped the economy of the Region basically. Baiga is a forest tribe mainly due to the topography and climate of the Region. Its food gathering and hunting activities solely depend upon the flora and fauna of the Region—a product of climate and soil.

Flora

The region lying between the Nerbudda River on the North and the Maikal range on the South is one of the most fascinating beauty spots in India. Hills and valleys, dense forests and grassy lands, water streams and ponds—all make the area a traveller's paradise. One may traverse any number of miles and yet the scene is never the same. The Sal with numberless variety of vegetation in its retinue interrupts the monotony of foliage. It is Nature in Jubilance. Throughout the summer its glossy-dark green foliage reflects the light in a thousand vivid tints; and just when all other vegetation is at its worst, a few weeks before the gates of heaven are opened in the annual monsoon, the Sal selects its opportunity and bursts into a fresh garment of the brightest and softest green.

From the point of view of variations in altitude, rainfall and soil the forests of the Baiga Region may be classified into four almost distinct types :—

(*i*) *Pure Sal*—In practically all the well-watered tracts, particularly in the valleys of Son, Banjar, Halon and Burhner, the Sal (Shorea robusta) grows luxuriantly, unmixed with any other species. The Sal tree is possessed of a most inextinguishable reproductive power, the seeds being shed by every mature tree in millions, and ready to germinate at once in a favourable position. The seedlings shoot rapidly above the danger of jungle frost and grow straight and tall before branching out. Singly it is a little formal in outline, though possessing a fine aspect from its horizontal, branching, bright evergreen leaves which are like broad laneheads, and having straight, tapering stems covered with grey and deeply fissured bark. Its great charm, however, resides in the fresh, cool aspect of the masses and belts in which it chiefly grows. A well-grown tree will attain to great dimensions, its girth frequently measuring as much as six or eight feet. The characteristic features of the Sal jungle are everywhere similar. This tree, being largely affected by the sub-soil water level and by frost, follows the valley contours. The valley bottoms are usually wide open grass savannahs wherein the young Sal seedlings are yearly killed off by frost. The Sal occupies the next belt, covering the hills entirely when they are low; when high, as is the case with the dadars or plateaus, the tops are a dense tangle of various creepers and the lowest part of the slope is covered with Sal. Here forests get a good rainfall, the water level is not very deep, and the soil also is light. The porous nature of the soil derived principally from the disintegration of sandstone affords facilities for the strong development of the root systems of plants. Reproduction is good and the permanancy of the forests is assured.

(*ii*) *Sal mixed with other species*—The forests on low hill slopes and in the valleys with a warmer southerly aspect are principally characterised by a hybrid Sal jungle. In the eastern and southern parts of the Region sloping upto Amarkantak the Sal is of poor quality, and rarely reaches a girth of more than three or four feet. Moreover, it has lost its monopoly of the forest, and no longer grows in solitary state, but is surrounded by all the other species including Sarai, Bija Sal, Aonla, teak, Tirisa, Dhawa, Hardu, etc.

(*iii*) *Mixed forests*—Provided the soil is suitable, any kind of tree may be found in a mixed forest. This type of forest is common to all parts of the Baiga Region except the Sal belts on favourable hill contours or river valleys. The most important species found in mixed forest are : teak (Tectona grandis), Saj (Terminalia tomentosa), Bija (Pterocarpus marsupium), Lendia (Lager stroemia parviflora), Mohwa (Bassia latifolia), Achar (Bucchania latifolia), Khair (Acacia katechu), Tendu (Diospyros melanoseylon), Harra (Terminalia chebula) and Dhawa (Anogeissus latifolia).

(*iv*) *Grass lands*—Vast tracts of luxuriant and tall grasses is a characteristic feature of the Plateau Zone of Madhya Pradesh. In the very heart of the pure Sal forests one can see scores of wide open glades covered with thick grasses. The line of demarcation, where the Sal forest ends and the grass lands begin, is always sharp and distinct, owing probably to frost or some unfavourable quality in the soil, which is fatal to the trees. In the forests of the plains, where generally the soil is heavy and rainfall is comparatively less, coarse grass and shrubs are commonly found all over the tract. Mandla District is celebrated in the State for its excellent grazing grounds to which numberless herds are driven from all the neighbouring districts. The principal grazing grasses are : Musail (Iseilema wightii) and Kel (Andropogon annulatus). The former has a thick, husky ear, the latter a thin ear, and both are of great value as fodder. Other species found in abundance are used for thatching, rope making, brooms and medicinal purposes. Their local names are : Ukri, Chhoti-ganair, Kandia, Purwa, Duha, Seua, Lamps, Chari, Kans, Nagarmotha, Bahai, Luse and Mohua.

Bamboos are mainly found in the valleys of Banjar, Deo and Son rivers. The two bamboos found in the tract are the Bana (Dendrocalamus strictus) and the Kattang or thorny bamboo (Bambusa arundinacea). The first-named occurs in enormous quantities in almost all forest areas, particularly in Baihar tehsil. Kattangs are not found in any considerable quantity except on the Deo river near Bhanpur in Balaghat district. The rare occurence of the general seeding of the bamboo forests, is a godsend to the aboriginal tribes. It affords an abundant supply of wholesome grain not only to the tribesmen but also to multitudes of the poor inhabitants of the open country.

Fauna

Forest clad rocks and ravines saturated by streams and springs provide most congenial surroundings for wild animals. Valleys of Banjar, Motinala and the banks of Nerbudda are infested with numerous kinds of animals and birds. However, parts of the Baiga Region contain practically no game of any kind, such as the Haweli and Pathar, where the steady advance of civilisation has driven everything except an occasional black buck or blue-bull. Also in the treeless central tract of Dindori or the Baiga Reservation, the axes, traps and arrows of the Baiga have cleared these once teeming jungles of every vestige of animal life. But generally speaking the jungles of the Region teem with game. A morning stalk through the Motinala, Phen or Banjar Reserves is usually rewarded by the sight of scores of animals of half a dozen different varieties.

The tiger (Felis tigris) is common to all parts of the Baiga Region, though it is more difficult to obtain than in less fortunate districts because of the extent of the jungles and the difficulty of beating. It does not run to the great length of the Bengal tiger but is generally of a very heavy built. The male tiger usually measures 9 feet, while females average above 8 feet in length. The animal is very destructive to game and cattle. In the hot weather he will often follow a herd of tame buffaloes for months killing one every third or fourth day. In the wet weather tigers retire to the hills following the game and avoiding flies. They mate at two seasons of the year, from October to November in the cold weather and again in April and May. They drop their young (usually 3 in number) in May and June, and December and January. Game killers are more numerous than the cattle-lifters. Another ferocious animal found all over the area is the panther, known as Chita, Gulbag or Tindua locally. It occasionally carries off smaller domestic animals such as dogs, goats and calves. The animal is an expert tree-climber and can place its kill twelve or fourteen feet above the ground in the fork of a tree. It is comparatively fearless of man and consequently very destructive to domestic animals. The Baigas and Gonds say that there are two kinds, differing as to habit and size, and that the smaller one (the leopard) keeps near villages, while the larger one (the panther) is found further in jungle. The Indian sloth bear (Melursus labiatus—bhalu) is found in all the hilly forests of the tract. A large male will measure over 6 feet from snout to root of the tail. Females average about 5′ 6″ in length. The animal is almost entirely nocturnal, sleeping nearly all day in caves or under trees in some shady spot. It is a deaf and foolish creature, which, though somewhat shy of man, can generally be cut off at day break on its way up from cultivation to the rocky lair. As a rule they are not dangerous, but if they are wounded or cornered will inflict a terrible mauling about the face of their enemy. They are vegetable eaters, but have occasionally been found on the kill of another animal. When nursing their young, they are particularly ferocious. Their favourite haunts are the rocky hills on the east and south of the Region, particularly Motinala range and the hills of Amarkantak. The bison, known as Banpada, Banbhainsa or Pagari (Bos Jaurius), is fairly numerous. During the open season the largest herds are found in the Banjar, and South Phen Reserves. During the rains the bison's range is widely extended, and his tracks may be found even in the open plains.

They are timid until wounded. Usually they are found moving in herds. Wild dogs (Kuon rutilaua), known as Sonkutta or Bankutta, are common all over the tract and are very destructive, both to cattle and game. They are handsome creatures with golden, dark-tipped, hair and a bush-tail, in all about the size of a jackal. They have no great speed but do have unfailing scent and unlimited endurance, and the fleetest animal is doomed when once a pack of them crosses its trail. They hunt in couples or packs. Fear is unknown to them and they can kill even a tiger. A popular belief is that when they attack a tiger they soak their tails in their own urine which is very acrid, and by flicking their tails in the tiger's face they blind it temporarily and so have it at their mercy. In attacking a tiger or panther they escape injury by making huge bounds in the air. Each pack has a recognised leader whose duty it is to head the final attack on any quarry. They eat everything, carrion, vegetables and occasionally their own kind. The wild pig is very common both in and out of the jungles, and is peculiarly destructive to crops. Though by preference a clean feeder, he is by no means so fastidious as is generally supposed, he will often visit and enjoy a dead and fairly advanced kill. Among other carnivora important ones are : wolf, jackal, hyena, fox, jungle cat, Langur, Sehi, etc.

One of the commonest deer is the so-called swamp-deer or Barasinga locally known as garni. The animal has a special liking for swampy and low-lying lands in the Sal-tracts. In recent times they have, however, started visiting even open plains, probably due to deforestation of certain areas. Their principal haunts are Banjar Reserve, Motinala, Phen Reserve and other deep pockets in the Sal forests. The head is usually ten pointed, but twelve pointers are by no means uncommon. They afford little sport being very easy to approach, particularly in the breeding season about Christmas. Their food consists almost entirely of grass. The next commonest dear is the beautiful Chital or spotted deer (Curvus axis) which is most frequently found in the well-watered jungles or river banks. The shedding of the horns does not usually begin till June or July. The animal lives in herds. It prefers more open forest than the Sambhar, and never ranges far from water. The Sambhar (Cervus unicolour) is found throughout the Baiga tract, wherever the jungle is extensive enough to give him a good run. He is a very shy animal, difficult to approach and, therefore, gives much better sport than the Barasinga. Anything over 36 inches may be considered a good head. Horns with more than the typical six-points are not uncommon. The animal is almost entirely nocturnal in its habits. Of antelopes the commonest is the black-buck locally known as Mirga. It is found mainly in the open plains of Raigarh-Bicchia, central part of Dindori and the plains of Baihar. The Nilgai (Bos elephas tragoeamelus) is frequent everywhere in the poorer jungles adjoining cultivation or open grass plains. The animal is practically unknown in the heart of the Sal forests. It lives in herds and feeds mornings and evenings and throughout the night.

Birds

Maikal jungles are full of birds of numberless variety. With sunset and sunrise rise the myriad symphony of the winged creatures. The commonest partridge is the 'painter' (Francolinus pictus) whose rancous cry from among thick grasses may be heard throughout the hills just before dark or during cloudy weather. The grey partridge is usually found near village sites or low jungles near cultivation. Quails of different varieties are common throughout the Region. The Sand-grouse (Pterodes exustus) is usually found in stony or sandy district. The green-pigeon (Harrel) may be seen anywhere and the blue pigeon (Kabutar) is seen near village sites or on the precipitous banks of the rivers. The pea-fowl or Mor (Pavo riestatus) is a common sight throughout the Region and in some parts does considerable damage to the crops. Baigas do not consider it a sacred bird like the Hindus and kill it with arrow, for eating. Of jungle fowl the red-spur fowl (galloper dix spadicea) or Banmurgi is fairly common everywhere as well as the red jungle-fowl which is also locally known as Banmurgi. It is a very shy bird and when disturbed escapes as a rule by running and not on the wing. Grus antigone, the Saras crane, is common in all parts and is usually met with in pairs. It is very tame and the popular idea is that if one is killed or dies, the other will die too of grief for the loss of its mate. The Region is not so rich in snipe or ducks; but ponds and tanks are not entirely without these birds. The different species are seen at different seasons of the year as if there is seasonal rotation in their visits to the favourite spots. Of duck the whistling teal and cotton teal are the commonest, and are indigenous. The Brahmini duck is also found on the Nerbudda, Banjar, and their tributaries in the open country until late in the hot weather. Species of herons and egrets commonly called Bugla by natives are usually found round tanks, marshes and river banks. The plumes of these creatures are much in demand. Other birds commonly found in the region are: Baya, Killkila, Lakarphor, Lahtora, Bhimraj, Lava, Gundru, Nukta, Girja, Silli, Jhils.

Fish

The rivers and ponds are well stocked with numerous kinds of fish which are a favourite article of food among nearly all classes. Some of the species run to a considerable size. The most common fish are Khusha, Saur, Kohu, Hain, Karot, Bam, Gegra, and Katia. The commonest tank fish is the Saur, which is fleshy and excellent in eating. Another fish, the Chal, which swims along the surface of the water generally makes its way up little nullahs at the beginning of the rains, and is netted by the Baigas on its return. Numbers of small fish are captured during the monsoon months in the rice fields and sometimes in creeks filled by the back waters of the rivers in flood. The local names of different species of fish differ to a great extent. In Mungeli tehsil, the most abundant are Pariyans, Ketra, Ketr-i, and Kokya. Arpa, Maniari, and Hanp rivers afford good opportunity for fishing to the aboriginals. When rivers are in flood, great numbers of fish of all sizes and varieties crowd up into sheltered corners out of the current, and as soon as the floods begin to subside, many a miraculous draught of fish can be obtained by a watchful aboriginal.

Geology

The eastern part of the Baiga Region is a varied assemblage of rock, some of which are older, and other newer than the Kadapah rocks of the southern belt. The rocks older than the Kadapah system include gneisses of Archaean age and slates belonging to the Dharwar system of Huronian age, locally known as Chilpi series. The rocks newer than the Kadapah system belong to the Gondwana system and include several sub-divisions. Of all these rocks older ones prevail in the eastern tract of the Baigaland which is occupied almost entirely by crystalline formations of the Archaean gneisses.

The central part of the Baiga Region is mainly covered by over-flowing trap. and its geology presents little variety. In the southern valley of the Banjar and eastward as far as the Kawardha border, there is a naraow strip of the country never more than fifteen miles broad, in which the crystalline formation is uppermost. East of the Banjar valley granite, limestone and syanite appear in some places on the edges of hills and nullahs; and occasionally sandstone is uncovered. Generally speaking, however, trap is the uppermost rock, capped by laterite on the highest peaks. The rugged hills and valleys of the east are of volcanic origin. Everywhere, both in the higher plateaus and in the valleys, the rocks are obscured by soil, generally recent or lateritic murram, the commonest soil in the Region, but also by the rich layers of decomposed trap, popularly known as black cotton. Generally these layers are shallow but somewhat deeper along the valleys of Nerbudda, Banjar and Thawar; and the sides of the hills and hillocks are almost invariably bare.

The southern part of the Baiga Region is occupied by an elevated plateau (2000 feet) which extends to the east into the Drug district and which rises so abruptly from the plains of Balaghat and Drug. Many hill-ranges and isolated peaks spring upto 2600 feet. In some parts of this plateau the rocks are more or less obscured by soil and the alluvium of the streams drain from it, but in all the higher and more hilly parts rock exposures are frequent. The Deccan trap is confined to the area north-east of the Banjar river. It is composed of the usual horizontal basaltic lava-flows giving rise to flat-topped hills. Similarly the Lametas, composed of gritty limestone, are found just below the Deccan trap. Other important rocks which occur in the southern part of the Baiga Region include the Chilpi ghat series and the crystalline schists which are found commonly on the Saletekri and Bijagarh plateau.

CHAPTER II

POPULATION OF BAIGA TRIBE

Out of the total population of 1,68,22,584 of the Central Provinces and Berar, the number of tribals according to 1941 Census was 29,90,701 which comes to 17.8 per cent of the total population*. The total tribal population of the State has been fluctuating practically every year. Consequently the ratio of the tribal population to the total population of the State has never remained the same. The following table shows the movement of general population and the tribal population during last fifty years in Madhya Pradesh.

MOVEMENTS OF TRIBAL POPULATION IN MADHYA PRADESH SINCE 1891.*

Year	Tribal Population	Proportion per 10,000 of Population	Variation per cent Increase (+) Decrease (−)
1891		**1455**	
1901	**13,35,573** (− States) 17,44,546	**1413**	**—11**
1911	**24,90,355**	**1560**	**+30**
1921	**21,14,046**	**1323**	**—15**
1931	**19,69,214**	**1095**	**— 7**
1941	**29,58,272**		(Net variation per cent **1891-193 111**).

It is difficult to analyse the reasons for the fluctuations in the proportion of tribals to the total population. The enormous preponderance of Hindus, including the depressed classes and Hinduised primitive tribes, is more than apparent. The Hindu community has grown nearly in proportion to the decrease in those following tribal religions. Whether these increases among Hindus are due to greater fertility than

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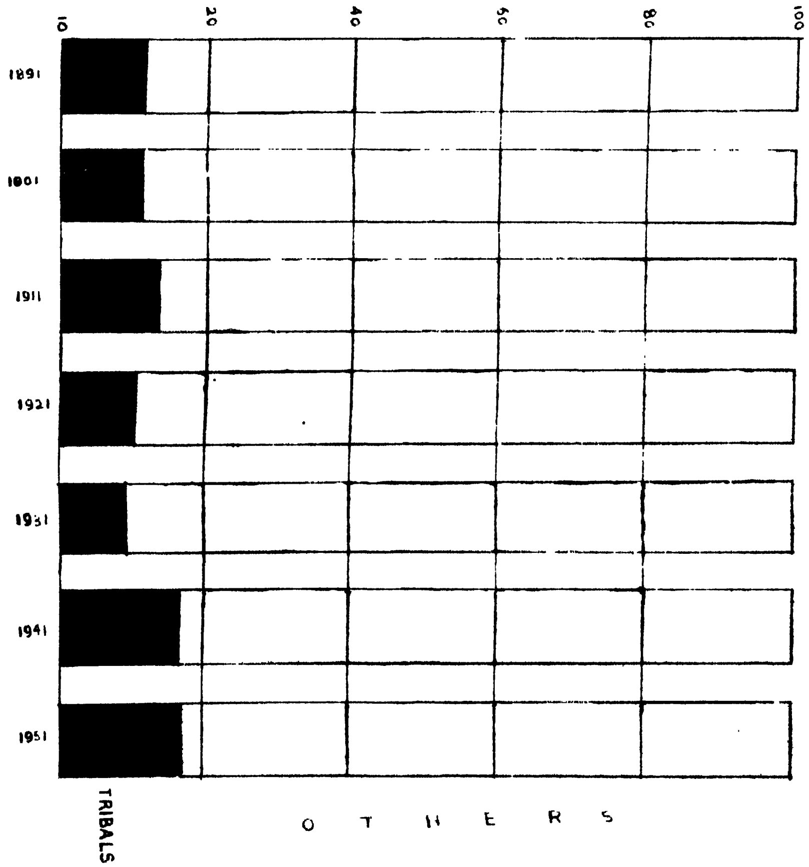
***Figures of aboriginal population of Madhya Pradesh for 1951 were not made available by the Census office at the time of drafting of this thesis.**

PERCENTAGE OF TRIBALS TO TOTAL POPULATION OF
MADHYA PRADESH (1891-1951).



in other religions or to less mortality, to conversions or to immigration, cannot be explained, because in this state vital statistics do not show births by separate religions and therefore no calculations can be made of the comparative rates of survival. However, the Census Report of 1931 throws some light on the question*. Where tribes have more or less kept to themselves and have not been in touch with the Hindus they returned as belonging to tribal religions, and where they have been more or less Hinduised as Hindus. With the opening up of aboriginal areas the contact of the aboriginal with Hindus is fast increasing. In the more advanced tracts, such as for instance Nagpur, Jabalpur, Buldana and Akola, the tribes are nearly all Hinduised. Consequently the number returned in 1931 as following tribal religions was about 1,45,000 less than in 1921, that is to say that considerably more than the whole natural increase in the population of the primitive tribes still alleged to be following their own code in 1921, was absorbed in Hinduism by 1931, which would appear to be an approximation to the truth, at any rate as far as the total proportions of the religions for the whole province are concerned.** A few instances of this tendency may be quoted with profit. In Korea State the Diwan reported at the time of 1931 Census that on the whole the 'Gonds and Rajwars are giving up their tribal customs in favour of Hinduism, and will probably be classed as Hindus at the next Census'. That people of forest tribes of Sarangarh State recorded as animists in 1921 without exception declared themselves Hindus in 1931 was attributed by the State Census Officer to the new tendency of Hinduism to absorb people, hitherto considered as outside the pale. The wide spread Christianisation of the Oraons is another factor working in the same direction. Inaccurate enumeration or classification of the tribes may also be partly responsible for wrong census of the tribes. Deliberate propaganda among tribals prompted by political or social motives had also in some cases vitiated the true figures.

Like every State of the Indian Union, every district of Madhya Pradesh has some aboriginal population. However, the aboriginals' number is not distributed fairly all over the State. In Buldana district they form only 2.3 per cent of the total population while in Bastar their strength is over 61 per cent. The wide disparity in the proportion of tribals to the total population of various districts indicates that social progress is not uniform all over the State. The following table shows the percentage of tribals to the total population in different districts:†

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*Census Report, C.P. & Berar, Part I, 1931, Pp. 924-333.

**Census Report, C.P. & Berar, 1931 Vol. I, p. 324.

†Agriculture Policy Committee Report, Madyha Pradesh, 1951, Appendix V. Grigson: The Aboriginal Problem in C.P. & Berar 'Appendix Table I'.

PERCENTAGE OF TRIBALS TO TOTAL POPULATION IN DISTRICTS OR STATES OF MADHYA PRADESH (1941 CENSUS).

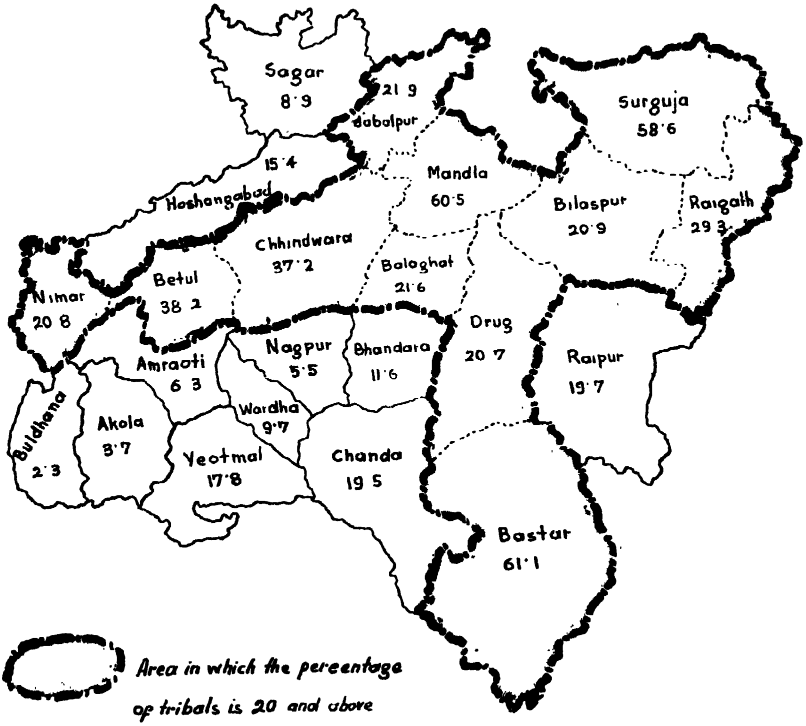
District		Percentage of Tribal Population to Total Population.
Bastar	...	61.1
Mandla	...	60.5
Sarguja	...	58.6
Betul	...	38.2
Chhindwara	...	37.2
Raigarh	...	29.3
Jabalpur	...	21.9
Balaghat	...	21.6
Bilaspur	...	20.9
Nimar	...	20.7
Drug	...	20.7
Raipur	...	19.7
Chanda	...	19.5
Yeotmal	...	17.8
Hoshangabad	...	15.4
Bhandara	...	11.6
Wardha	...	9.7
Saugor	...	8.9
Amraoti	...	6.3
Nagpur	...	5.5
Akola	...	3.7
Buldana	...	2.3
C.P.& Berar (Indian States not included in the total of the whole Province).	...	17.8

Taking the areas where tribal percentage is 20 or more as predominantly aboriginal the tribal map of Madhya Pradesh will be as shown on the next page.

Total Population of Baiga Region.

After making a general review of tribal population of the State, we can now proceed to examine the population of the Baiga Region comprising the districts of Balaghat, Bilaspur and Mandla. The total population of the Baiga Region according to the 1951 census is 29,20,636. An analysis of the *variation of population of the Region during the last 50 years* is shown in the following table :—

MAP SHOWING THE AREAS IN WHICH THE PERCENTAGE OF TRIBALS TO TOTAL POPULATION IS 20 AND ABOVE.



VARIATION IN POPULATION OF BAIGA REGION DURING FIFTY YEARS

District	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	Percentage variation 1931-41	1951	Percentage variation 1941-51	Net variation 1901-1951
Balaghat	3,99,934	4,75,924 + 75,990	5,11,634 + 35,710	5,61,602 + 49,968	6,34,350 + 72,748	+ 12.95	6,93,379 + 59,029	+ 9.31	+2,93,445
Bilaspur	8,97,758	11,27,666 +229,908	12,10,560 + 82.894	13,76,475 +1,65.915	15,49,509 +1,73,034	+ 12.57	16,79,637 +1,30,128	+ 8.39	+7,81,879
Mandla	3,18,381	4,05,234 + 86,853	3,86,446 + 18,788	4,45,766 + 59,320	5,04,580 + 58,814	+ 13.9	5,47,620 + 43,040	+ 8.53	+2,29,239
Baiga Region	16,16,073	20,08,824	21,08,640	23,83,843	26,88,439		29,20,636		+13,04,536

The total population of the Region, as the above table shows has increased from 16,16,073 in 1901 to 29,20,636 in 1951 recording a net increase of 13,04,563 persons in a period of fifty years. Thus there has been 80.7 per cent increase in the total population of the Baiga Region since 1901. The main causes of increase in the total population are, as in the case of the whole country, the high birth and death rates in the region which in their turn are the results of malnutrition, low vitality, epidemics, illiteracy, social evils and lack of medical facilities. The following table depicts the birth and death rates of the Baiga region.

BIRTH AND DEATH RATES IN BAIGA REGION

(Per Mille of Population.)*

Year	MANDLA		BALAGHAT		BILASPUR	
	Birth Rate	Death Rate	Birth Rate	Death Rate	Birth Rate	Death Rate
1931	41.43	23.39	39.99	25.34	48.89	32.77
1932	39.86	23.65	38.38	21.10	43.78	27.16
1933	...	22.30	35.21	21.23	42.97	23.65
1934	42.49	31.68	37.97	31.62	42.16	26.34
1935	43.16	27.92	36.65	25.47	38.84	34.19
1936	40.25	23.68	24.70	...	...	...
1937	38.04	25.05	33.92	23.40	41.65	28.07
1938	41.29	30.24	35.93	30.55	40.29	29.57
1939	38.99	32.21	36.17	29.14	45.22	29.88
1940	38.93	30.48	36.08	28.90	...	...
1941	41.39	28.25	41.87	31.49	...	...

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*Based on District Gazetteers.

Density of Population in Baiga Region.

The total population increase is, however, not reflected in the density of population of the Baiga Region. The population density of a region largely depends upon its topography, natural resources and the stage of its economic development. The Baiga Region as we have seen in the first chapter, is a hilly tract, covered with forests, of very poor soil and undeveloped natural resources. As a result the average density of the Region (rural areas) is as low as 169. There are marked variations in the population density of different parts of the Region. In Mandla District (rural) it is 106, and in Bilaspur District except the northern part of Mungeli tehsil and eastern part of Katghora tehsil plain land dominates. The following table shows the density of population in the Baiga Region :

DENSITY OF POPULATION IN THE BAIGA REGION*

District	Area in sq. miles	Persons.	Density		
			Total	Rural	Urban
Balaghat	3,557	6,93,379	195	186	4,722
Bilaspur	7,538	16,79,637	223	214	9,262
Mandla	5,057	5,47,620	108	106	3,561
Whole Baiga Region.	16,152	29,20,636	175 (Average)	169 (Average)	5,848 (Average)

The Baigas being a forest tribe the majority of them does not reside in the plains. Therefore, even the figures of density of rural areas do not depict the real situation. Nor do the Baigas live in all the tehsils of the district. It is, therefore, necessary to analyse figures of those tehsils where Baigas actually reside. The Baiga villages are mostly situated in Baihar tehsil (Balaghat), Mungeli and Katghora tehsils

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*District Census Handbooks (1951)

Note :—The density has not been calculated on the actual area figures supplied by the Deputy Commissioners, but on the figures as shown in column (2) of the table.

(Bilaspur) and Mandla and Dindori tehsils (Mandla). The density of these tracts is shown in the table given below :

TEHSILWISE DENISTY OF POPULATION IN THE BAIGA REGION

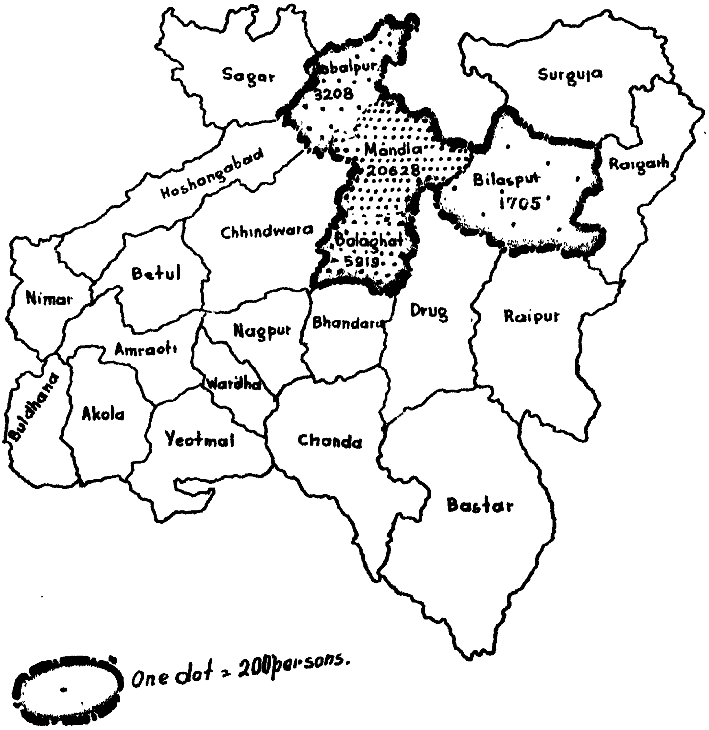
Tehsil	Area in sq. miles.	Persons	Density per sq. mile in rural areas
Balaghat District			
Balaghat Tehsil	1,083	2,29,465	212
Baihar Tehsil	1,556	1,24,772	80
Waraseoni Tehsil	911	3,04,765	335
Bilaspur District			
Bilaspur Tehsil	2,205	5,13,054	233
Mungeli Tehsil	1,451	2,59,233	179
Janjgir Tehsil	1,322	5,66,615	429
Katghora Tehsil	2,533	2,75,899	108
Mandla District			
Mandla Tehsil	2,104	2,41,124	115
Dindori Tehsil	1,561	1,42,472	91
Niwas Tehsil	1,388	1,49,781	108

It will be seen from the above table that density ranges between 80 in Baihar tehsil to 179 in Mungeli. In the absence of detailed figures of 1951 Census, it is not possible to calculate the density of the real Baiga tract. However, the average density of these five tehsils which is 115 gives a rough idea of the density of population in the tract.

Composition of Aboriginal Population of Baiga Region

The aboriginals of the Baiga Region do not belong to only one tribe. Gonds being the most important tribe of the Region were 5,40,155 in 1941. Kawars stand second numbering 66,629. But they are

Map Showing Geographical Distribution of Baiga Population



exclusively concentrated in the district of Bilaspur. Baigas enjoy third position in the region with the total strength of 28,252, nearly 20,628 residing in the Mandla District alone. The Pardhans number about 20,966 in the whole Region. The following table shows the population of important tribes in order of numerical strength residing in the Baiga region :—

POPULATION OF SELECTED TRIBES OF BAIGA REGION.*

District	Gond	Kawar	Baiga	Pardhan	Kol	Binjhwar	Saora	Halba
Balaghat	97685	Nil	5919	5761	2543	8594	Nil	2599
Bilaspur	191649	66629	1705	2378	3260	1089	9197	Nil
Mandla	250821	Nil	20628	12827	10161	Nil	Nil	Nil
Whole Region	540155	66629	28252	20966	15964	9683	9197	2599

The Baiga tribe as the above table shows numerically occupies third position in the Region. But it may be pointed out that in aboriginal society its social status is the highest. Even the Gonds who predominate in number respect the Baiga; other aboriginals also take his help and guidance in times of crisis like disease. Every one has a regard for his skill and knowledge of the forest work, and above all believe in his tribal purity and solidarity.

A word of caution may, however be noted about the statistics of aboriginal population. The population statistics of forest tribes cannot be trusted for their accuracy or scientific basis. Enumerators' ignorance of tribal divisions, inaccessibility of the aboriginal areas, tribal's fear of official enquiries and political motives interfere with the true picture of aboriginal demography. "Indeed it is not possible to trust statistics about the Baiga for", as Dr. Elwin has remarked, "in the first place the name Baiga is given to many village priests who are not members of the tribe, and in the second place, there are allied tribes like the Binjhwar, Bhumia and Bhaina who are so similar that they are often not distinguished. Thus there are Binjhwar Baiga and Baiga Binjhwar—Baiga who are members of the Binjhwar sub-division of the Baiga tribe proper, and members of the Binjhwar tribe who are called Baiga because they act as sorcerers. There are Bhaina-Baiga and Baiga members of the

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* Figures supplied by the Tribal Welfare Department, Madhya Pradesh Government.

Bhaina tribe. There are Gond-waina Baiga who are quite different from Gond who are simply fulfilling the functions of a Baiga; Bhumia-Baiga who must not be confused with the Baiga members of the Bhumia tribe"*. It is difficult for an ordinary Census enumerator to collect correct figures without first knowing the intricacies involved in the classification of different tribes. The mistake at the source creeps into the records of the highest Census Officer, for the man at the top has hardly any scientific information about the tribals to enable him to correct the inaccuracies at the final stage. Besides, there are other difficulties also in the case of the Baiga. Till recently Baigas shifted their villages from one forest to another in search of *bewar* patches. Census Officers considered them as nomads and did not take so much care in counting the tribe. Particularly after the prohibition of *bewar*, Baigas crossed the boundaries of districts and ran into the territories of neighbouring Indian States where they were permitted to fell forests. Again changes in the boundaries of the districts of Baiga region had interfered with the set map of the Baiga population. Further, the spots where Baigas live are located in some of the most inaccessible parts of the State. It is very risky to visit these areas as they are infested with wild animals. Even bullock cart or pony is out of question. Naturally the Census enumerators cannot visit such areas so often; and therefore not unoften they fill up their returns on the basis of second hand information. It is for these reasons that 'the true strength of the Baigas is never recorded'.† An attempt is, however, made to analyse the trends of Baiga population—for what they are worth.

VARIATION IN BAIGA POPULATION IN MADHYA PRADESH
(1881-1931)

Year	Baiga Population	Increase (+) or Decrease (—)
1881	38,883	
1891	21,336	(—) 17,547
1901	23,471	(+) 2,135
1911	27,274	(+) 3,803
1921	25,078	(—) 2,196
1931	37,086	(+) 12,008
1941	30,460	(—) 6,626

* Elwin : 'The Baiga', p. 522.

† Census of India, 1931, Vol. XX, p. 227.

Variation in Baiga Population.

There have been steep fluctuations, as the above table shows, in the Baiga population between 1881-1941. It is difficult to ascribe any definite reason for these changes. They may be due to prohibition of *bewar* and the consequent migration of the Bewar-cutting Baigas from the former British Provinces to Indian States where *Bewar* was permitted. 'But it is more likely', as Elwin has remarked, 'that they were caused by confusion as to what a Baiga really was'.* The figures of Bilaspur are a typical instance of such confusion. In Bilaspur there were 11,523 Bhaina and 11,792 Binjhwar in 1921, some of whom might have been sometimes included in and at other excluded from Baigas. This accounts for steep changes in the Baiga population of the Bilaspur district.

BAIGA POPULATION OF BILASPUR DISTRICT

Year	Population
1881	8,433
1891	794
1901	2,716
1911	157
1921	405
1931	2,404

The relative position of the Baiga population in the Region may also be ascertained, although the Statistics, as stated earlier, are of a very limited reliability. Out of the total population of the Baiga Region numbering 26,88,439, the number of Baigas according to 1941 Census was 28,252, that is 1.05 per cent of the total population. The total tribal population of the Region was recorded as 7,63,310 in 1941. The Baigas were 3.7 per cent of the total tribal population of the Region. Regionally Baiga's percentage of the tribal population was 6.8 in Mandla District, 4.3 in Balaghat District and .53 in Bilaspur District. The topography, density of forests and inaccessibility of these regions explain variations in the percentages of Baiga population to the total tribal population of different districts. Mandla District being a hilly and forest covered tract provides best habitat to the Baiga, while the plains of Bilaspur are inhospitable to the forest tribe. The following table shows Baigas' relative position in the total population of the Region :

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*Elwin ; Op. Cit. p. 523.

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF BAIGA POPULATION IN BAIGA REGION
(BASED ON 1941 CENSUS)

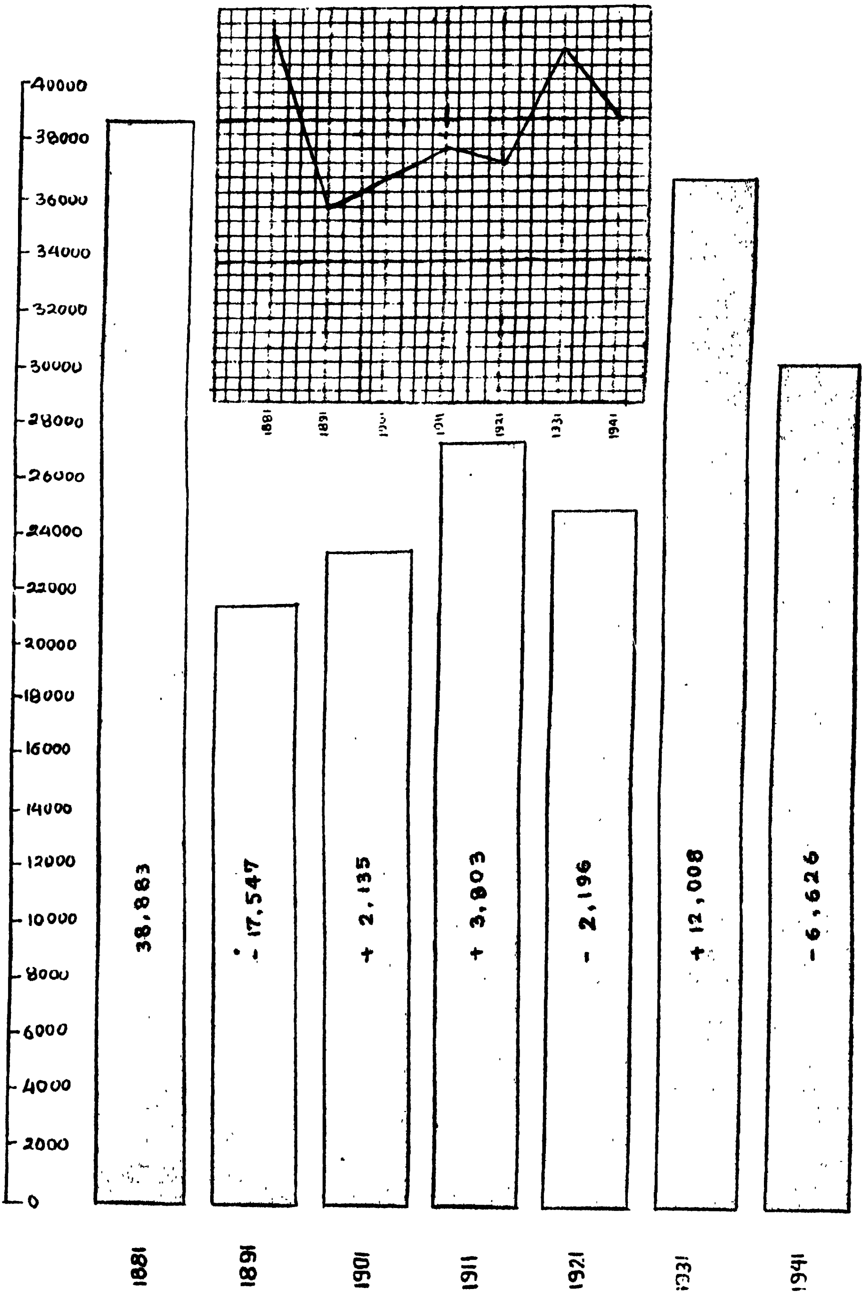
District	Total Population	Total Tribal Population	Baiga Population		
			Number of persons	% of total Population	Percentage of Tribal Population
Balaghat	6,34,350	1,37,142	5,919	.91	4.3
Bilaspur	15,49,509	3,23,350	1,705	.11	.53
Mandla	5,04,580	3,02,818	20,628	4.08	6.8
Whole Region	26,88,439	7,63,310	28,252	1.05	3.7

But Baigas are not spread all over the Region. Dense forests and rugged hills are the choicest abode of the tribe. As a result, the tribesmen are concentrated in some selected areas of the Maikal range. The real Baigas live in a compact block of country with Mandla District as its centre. The map on the next page depicts the geographical distribution of the Baiga tribe.

Pressure of population on net cropped area.

The geographical distribution of the Baiga tribe does not indicate the pressure of population on the total area of cropped land, for Baigas formed only 1.05 per cent (1941 Census) of the total population of the region. Nearly 26,88,439 persons in the region depend upon 39,79,000 acres of net cropped area. The net cropped area per head comes to 1.4 acres approximately. In the absence of tehsilwise figures of net cropped area it is not possible to calculate the net cropped area per head for the tract in which Baigas are concentrated. But personal observation showed that Baiga tracts were full of hills, valleys and *barra* land ; level fields were an exception. It may, therefore, be safely presumed that net

Variation in Baiga Population



cropped area in the Baiga tracts, if not less, is in no case more than that of the Region as a whole. The true position emerges when the fact is taken into account that the soils of Baiga villages are poorer than that of the plains, and irrigation facilities are almost unknown. Hence qualitatively the net cropped area per head is definitely less in the Baiga villages than the non-Baiga villages of the Region. The Mandla District shows the highest net cropped area per head, *i.e.*, 1.4 acres per head. But it may be pointed out that Baigas of this District live in those very parts where the fertility of the soil is the poorest, namely South East of Dindori, Southern Mandla and North West of Niwas. The high figure of net cropped area per head is, therefore, an indication not of better and bigger farms but of poor quality of the soil. The more fertile an area is, the greater the density of population and lower the net cropped area per head, and conversely the less fertile an area, the lower the density of population and quantitatively greater the net cropped area per head. The following table depicts this tendency operating in the Baiga region :

PRESSURE OF POPULATION ON LAND IN BAIGA REGION (1946-47)
(IN THOUSAND ACRES)

District	Total Area	Area under Forest	Total Net Cropped area (in acres)	Total Population	Density per sq. mile	Net Cropped Area per head (in acres)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Balaghat	3,557	652	579.9	6,34,350	186	.91(Apprx)
Bilaspur	7,538	1,264	1,740.6	15,49,509	214	1.1 ,,
Mandla	5,057	1,227	746.8	5,04,580	108	1.4 ,,
	16,152	3,143	3,979.3	26,88,439		1.4 ,,

The Mandla District is the wildest part of the Region, its density is also the lowest (108 per sq. mile) but the net cropped area per head is the highest namely 1.4 acres. The districts of Balaghat and Bilaspur where fertile level plains are not lacking recorded high density of 186 and 214 persons per square mile respectively; but the net cropped area per head was as low as .91 and 1.1 acres respectively. The case of Bilaspur District needs further explanation as here high density of population is accompanied by slightly greater net cropped area per head. Except a strip of rugged land on the northern boundary, whole of the district is a level plain irrigated by rivers and nalahs. As a result, the rural population has wider opportunities of cultivating better quality of land. Further, multiplying population has compelled the people to utilise every kind of land. For the present the population has, it appears, not outstripped land supply in this District. Hence high density of population and greater net cropped area per head are existing together. But in the long run the District is bound to fall in line with Balaghat, when the agricultural land of the former is fully utilised.

Social aspect of Baiga population.

The foregoing analysis of pressure of population on agricultural land shows the economic effects of growing population of the Baiga. Its social effects also deserve reader's attention. A sample survey of demographic conditions of 350 Baiga families undertaken by the author disclosed certain tendencies working among the Baiga. However the author does not claim any statistical accuracy for the results of the survey from the point of view of their wider application. They indicate mere broad trends and do not measure the social factors operating in Baiga population. The following table shows the average size of family in different regions of the Baiga land :-

AVERAGE SIZE OF BAIGA FAMILY

Region	Total population surveyed	Number of families surveyed	Average size of family
Baiga Chak	658	91	7.2
Baihar Tehsil	333	55	6.0
Dindori ,,	333	57	5.8
Kawardha ,,	114	27	4.2
Mandla ,,	458	68	6.7
Mungeli ,,	305	52	5.7
Whole Region	2192	350	6.25

An average size Baiga family according to the survey consists of 6.25 persons. However, the size of family is not the same even approximately in different parts of the Baiga land. It varies between 4.2 in Kawardha and 7.2 in the Baiga Chak. In the absence of detailed social data about the tribe it is difficult to explain the variation in the size of family in different regions. However, a general description of the factors which seemed to have influenced the size of family among the Baiga may be given. In the old order when Baigas had freedom of felling the forest, the youth established a separate home soon after the marriage. The practice kept the size of family small. But after stoppage of shifting cultivation Baigas, as they told, find it more profitable to have a joint family of bigger size, for it proves helpful in plough cultivation which requires continuous labour for the whole year. The greater the dependence of population on agriculture in a region, the bigger the size of family in it. For instance, in Baiga Chak where 94 per cent of total income is derived from agriculture the size of family is 7.2 persons. Opposite is the case of Kawardha where Baigas were free to cut forest before the merger and therefore it was profitable for them to split up their family for demanding more Bewar land. The size of family is 4.2 in Kawardha, the lowest in the Baiga land. Forest and road work also influence the size of family among the Baiga. Temporary migration of the males to their place of work exercises a regulatory check on the growth of the family. Further, independent family can claim separate wages and thus add to its income as wife and husband. This factor appears to be responsible for keeping the size of family in Mandla and Baihar near the average size. The conditions in Dindori and Mungeli have also been influenced by the above factors to some extent.

The total population of 2192 persons when divided into age-groups reveals interesting facts. The following table shows the distribution of 2192 Baigas into age-groups :—

DISTRIBUTION OF BAIGA POPULATION INTO AGE-GROUPS

Total number of persons surveyed 2192

Age group	Population	Percentage to total population surveyed
Children (below 15 years)	879	40.1
Adults (between 15-45 years)	971	44.3
Old persons (over 45)	342	15.6

As will be seen from the above table 40.1 per cent of the population surveyed was below 15 years, 44.3 was between 15 and 45 years and 15.6 per cent was above 45 years. But it should not lead us to believe that only the adults (between 15 and 45 years) who form 44.3 per cent of the total population are the earning members. In fact a Baiga boy above 10 years helps his parents in herding the cattle, sowing or weeding. Similarly the old work upto the age of 65. A rough estimate disclosed that of 2192 persons surveyed 1298 (59 per cent of the total) were working adults among the Baiga families. The sex ratio of the Baiga is indicated in the table below :—

SEX RATIO AMONG BAIGAS

Total population	2192
Number of males	1108
Percentage of total population	50.5
Number of females	1084
Percentage of total population	49.5

The sample survey shows that the sex ratio among Baigas is 50.5 per cent males and 49.5 per cent females. The tribe is therefore well balanced as far as the ratio of males to females is concerned. Polygamy has a social sanction among them but its occurrence is not common. The fact is further corroborated by a sound proportion of the male population to the female population. The proportion of married males and females among the married is tabulated below :—

PROPORTION OF MARRIED MEN AND WOMEN TO TOTAL MARRIED POPULATION.

Number of married persons of both sexes	1033
Number of married men	504
Percentage of total number of married persons	48.8
Number of married women	529
Percentage of total number of married persons	51.2
Percentage of married persons of both sexes to total population surveyed	47.1

Among the married persons 48.8 per cent were males and 51.2 per cent were females, and 47.1 per cent of the total population surveyed was found married. Baigas generally marry their boys between 16 and 18 and the girls between 15 and 17. Marriage after maturity is almost the rule in the tribe. In recent years, however contact with rural population has encouraged Baigas to marry their daughters at an early age.

The social aspect of the Baiga demography may be concluded with a review of literacy in the tribe. The following table shows the percentage of literate persons among the 350 families surveyed :—

LITERACY AMONG BAIGAS

Region	Total population surveyed	Number of literates	% to total population	Number of male literates	% to total population	Number of female literates	% to total population.
Baiga Chak	658	14	2.1	14	2.1	Nil	Nil
Dindori Tehsil	333	2	0.6	2	0.6	Nil	Nil
Mandla ,,	458	18	3.9	18	3.9	Nil	Nil
Mungeli ,,	296	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Kawardha ,,	114	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Baihar ,,	333	35	10.5	29	8.7	6	1.8
Total	2192	69	3.1	61	2.8	8	0.4

Out of 2192 persons surveyed only 69 were found literate *i.e.* 3.1 per cent of the total number of persons surveyed. Among the 69 literate persons 61 were males and 8 were females. The literate females were only 0.4 percent of the total number of persons surveyed. A regionwise analysis proves the gravity of the situation. The percentage of literacy was 10.5 in Baihar tehsil, 3.9 in Mandla, 2.1 Baiga Chak, 0.6 in Dindori and zero in Mungeli and Kawardha. In Mandla and Baihar the isolation has been broken, the development schemes of the Tribal Welfare and Forest Departments are in operation and Baigas have been accultured to some extent. Hence somewhat higher percentage of literacy in these tracts. But other regions of the Baiga land recorded almost negligible percentage of literacy. Moreover the standard of literacy is awfully low in the tribal areas. Anyone who knows some alphabets or can write his name is considered literate. But from the point of view of social education an illiterate of a big village knows more of the world and its affairs than a literate Baiga. The reasons are quite clear. The Education Department has not paid any special attention towards the problem of tribal education. Most of the schools have been opened in big aboriginal villages of mixed character where proportion of the Baiga population is very low. Moreover, the type of education, manner of its impartation and the teacher, all go against the needs, traditions and beliefs of the Baiga. As a result, they are not yet convinced of the utility of formal education of modern type, particularly of the three R's.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL LIFE OF THE BAIGA

Capt. Thomson was the first person to write about the Baigas in his Seonee Settlement Report in 1867. The tribe was in the most primitive stage in his times and feared contact with the civilised men. 'They fly out at one end of the village as you appear at the other, and you can see them scrambling up the hill sides amongst the stones and bushes, or hiding and peeping at you from behind bushes like wild animals.' They lived in the most inaccessible hills and the remotest forests. Primarily they were foodgatherers and subsisted on forest products and hunting. Some of them raised wild grains on small strips on the hill sides*.

In 1870 Colonel Ward's Mandlah Settlement Report brought out some interesting facts about the Baigas of the Mandla District. 'Wild as the forests they live in, they are independent, highly spirited, very well-behaved, ready to oblige and deserving every consideration for their ordinary manner of life. A Baiga village in the heart of the Mykul range is a sight worth seeing.'†

A more detailed and sympathetic description of this wild tribe was made available in 1871 by Capt. J. Forsyth in his remarkable book the 'Highlands of Central India.' He found the Baigas far superior to the Gonds in every respect. Forsyth had roamed like a shikari all over the Highland and had studied tribal life quite intimately. He found the majority of the Baigas utterly unreclaimed, but he had also come across a few who had modified their original habits. Some of them had started living in the Gond villages and others received Hindu influence. But the real Baiga of the hill range was 'still almost in a state of nature.' Forsyth describes them as 'destitute of all clothing but a small strip of cloth, wearing long, tangled coal-black hair and furnished with bow and arrow and a keen little axe hitched over the shoulder, the Baiga is the very model of a hill aboriginie. He scorns all tillage but the *dhya* clearing (shifting cultivation) on the mountain side, pitching his neat habitation of bamboos, wicker-work, like an eagle's eyrie, on a small hill-top or ledge of rock, far above the valleys penetrated by pathways, and ekes out the fruits of the earth by an unwearied pursuit of game.'*

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*W B Thomson—Report of the Land Revenue Settlement of the Seonee District, 1867. p. 39.

†H.C E. Ward —Report of the Land Revenue Settlement of the Mandlah District, 1868-69, p. 36.

Prompted by a desire to 'reclaim the tribe to religion and civilisation', Colonel Bloomfield, a District Officer, made an appeal to his co-religionists in Britain through his 'Notes on Baigas' in 1885. After the publication of this pamphlet there was a long gap in literature on the Baiga tribe. In 1916 Russell and Hiralal released their famous study of the Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces which contains a brief description of the tribe. It described the Baiga as 'a primitive Dravidian tribe whose home is on the Eastern Satpura Hills in the Mandla, Balaghat and Bilaspur Districts'. 'In the tract where the Baigas live, they as the most ancient residents are usually the priests of the 'indigenous gods'...............In Mandla the decision of a Baiga on a boundary dispute is almost always considered as final, and this authority is of a kind that commonly emanates from recognised priority of residence.' Russell and Hiralal tell of the past glory of the tribe and quote the Ain-i-Akbari wherein the Baigas are described as paying their tribute to the Mughal Emperor in elephants and gold Mohurs. Many old Baigas claimed that at one time there ruled a Baiga King in the Chattisgarh division and cite the example of some Binjhwars—an offshoot of the present tribe—still holding some estates. They were driven into the Satpura Hills where Russell and Hiralal found them in a wild state. "No roads or well-defined paths connected them with ordinary lines of traffic and more thickly inhabited tracts, but perched away in snug covers in the hills and hidden by convenient projecting spurs and dense forests from the country round, they could not be seen except when nearly approached, and were seldom visited unless by occasional enterprising Banias and vendors of country liquor."† Russell's study throws sufficient light on the mythology, tribal divisions, social institutions and customs, religion and their general mode of life.

In 1931 Mr. W.H. Shoobert, Superintendent of Census Operations, C.P. & Berar, collected some information about the tribe and appended a note on the Baiga of Mandla and Balaghat. Since the tribe had, by 1931, divided itself into many sub-tribes and some of its offshoots like the Binjhwars had completely broken off their ties, it was found difficult to classify the sub-castes residing in different blocks of the country. Describing the life in the Baiga Chak—the only area where shifting cultivation was permitted—Mr. Shoobert writes, 'I was rather disappointed when I visited the place because I found them wearing more clothes than I liked. In fact they were getting civilised. I missed the fine physique, which has been described in Russell's book. They have started regular cultivation with *Bewar*. They are, however, still a very amiable set of people, jolly and inquisitive. They would insist on having a ride in the car'.* While touring the Balaghat area where the Binjhwar of higher social status live, Mr. Shoobert noted that Baigas bathed every three or four days and had taken to the practice of burning their dead when it could be afforded. They sacrificed a cock when a field was first sown but there was no worship at the harvest time.

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*J. Forsyth : The Highlands of Central India, 1871, p. 301.

†Russell and Hiralal, opt. cit. Vol ii. Chapter on Baigas.

Dr. Elwin's monograph.

A fuller and more scientific account of the Baiga was, however, destined to be written by Dr. Verrier Elwin, an anthropologist of international repute, who has devoted nearly 25 years of his life to the cause of aboriginals of Central India. 'Anthropology has waited a hundred years', Dr. J. H. Hutton rightly says, 'for a full account of the Baiga, but Mr. Elwin has paid the debt as fully as any single author could who had to work on a tribe after its tribal life and organisation had largely gone'. Elwin's book throws abundant light on the social life of the tribe. But the most important part of Elwin's work is probably to be found in that section of his book which deals with the tribe's future. He has pleaded that unless some special measures are taken there is no future for the Baiga, 'one of the most ancient, most remarkable, and most delightful of the peoples of India.'. Elwin's book is the first of its kind on a single tribe of this State. It is a monumental contribution to literature on social anthropology and suggests a completely new approach to the problems of those *adivasis* whose culture and mode of life have not been fully annihilated by the forces of 'civilisation'.

Racial Classification

Nothing definite can be said about the early history of the Baiga tribe for historical records or epics do not contain any direct reference to it. Since the tribe has been living in isolated jungles its contribution to the making of Indian history as such is negligible. There is no historical record about the condition of the tribe at the time of the Aryan invasion. Nor do historians of the Hindu period seem to have attached any importance to the tribe. However, in the Mughal period some reference is available about the socio-economic conditions of the Garha-Mandla area†. It is stated in the Ain-i-Akbari‡ that the country of Garha Mandla abounded in wild elephants and that the people paid their tribute in these and gold mohurs. In Mandla area the Baigas sometimes hang out from their houses a bamboo mat fastened to a long pole to represent a flag which, they say, once flew from the palace of a Baiga King*. Their belief finds further confirmation in the land possessions of Binjhwars, a section of the Baiga tribe which seceded from the main tribe, at a later period. After the fall of the Muslim rule, however, some broken links can be picked up here and there from history which throw some light on the social life of the tribe. A brief summary of these references is given elsewhere.

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*Census Report 1931, C. P. & Berar. Part I, p. 404.

†Elwin ; op. cit. p. 327.

‡Jarretts : 'Ain-i-Akbari', Vol. ii, p. 196.

Like the early history of the tribe, it is difficult to make any accurate statement about its racial affinities for there is a lack of comparative ethnological survey of the whole State. Nor much can be said about the anthropometric characters of the Baiga for no attempt has so far been made to study the racial characteristics of different tribes of the State. Thus what is written about the racial origin and affinities of the Baiga tribe is mainly based on the writings of certain administrators, authors or census officers. In the absence of early history of the tribe and its later evolution, a description based on scattered fragments is permissible. Elwin, who made an anthropological study of the Baiga was also faced with the same difficulty and preferred to write not much about the early history or anthropometric character of the tribe**.

The Baigas belong to one of the oldest strata of races in India. There is much which suggests that the tribe is an offshoot of the Kolarian race. Eminent ethnographers like Dr. J.H. Hutton admit that 'Kolarian tongues entered India both from the North-West and from the East'† and the Baiga tribe originally belonged to one of the two separate settlements of the Kolarian or Munda race classified by Russell and Hiralal‡. The Census Report of India, 1931, also classed the Baiga tribe under the Munda group. S.C. Roy, the pioneer of Indian Anthropology also admits that the tribe is a member of the Munda or Kolarian group. Elwin is in agreement with the classification by Russell & Hiralal and S.C. Roy.§ Moreover, there are certain practices prevalent among the tribe which prove its antiquity. Baigas still use the verticle fire-drill and the fire-saw, the latter method being typically

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* Russell and Hiralal; 'Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces and Berar,' Vol. II

** Elwin in his preface to 'The Baiga'.

† Dr. J.H. Hutton in his Foreword to Elwin's 'The Baiga'.

‡ Russell and Hiralal, Ibid, vol. ii p. 310.

†† S.C. Roy : 'The Hill Bhuiyas of Orissa', p. 20.

§ Elwin, op. cit., p. 4.

Indonesian. Other items also trace their association with Indonesia or Oceania. The use of stilts at one of the harvest festivals, link them as far as tribes of the Indian Archipelago and to Marquesas. The Baiga custom of tattooing based on the belief that it will survive the other world, traces Baiga's affinity with the tribals of Borneo.

There is a general concensus of opinion among the anthropologists who have studied the tribes of this State that the Baiga is a branch of the Bhuiya tribe, at present residing in the neighbouring areas of Jashpur and Sarguja. Though at present the Baigas are concentrated in Mandla and Balaghat Districts, this region does not appear to be their original home. For, according to Russell and Hiralal, it is unlikely that the Baigas would have made their first settlements in one of the wildest and most inhospitable tracts of Mandla and Maikal range, and spread thence into the fertile plain of Chattisgarh. 'But it is fairly certain that the Baiga tribe were among the earliest if not the earliest residents of the Chattisgarh plain and the hills north and east of it.'* Thus they are believed to have emigrated from Chattisgarh into the Satpura hills on the Western borders of the plain. Citing examples of Baiga's affinities with other tribes of the State Russell and Hiralal write, 'The Bhaina, Bhuiya and Binjhwar tribes who still reside in this country (Chattisgarh division) can all be recognised as offshoots of the Baigas. Some of the oldest forts in Bilaspur are attributed to the Bhaina and a chief of this tribe is remembered as having ruled in Bilaigarh, South of the Mahanadi. They are said to have been dominant in Pendra where they are still most numerous. The Binjhwars or Binjhals again are an aristocratic sub-division of the Baiga belonging to the hills east of Chattisgarh and the Uriya plain country of Sambalpur beyond them. Sir G. Grierson also states that the language of the Baigas of Mandla and Balaghat is a form of Chattisgarhi, and this is fairly conclusive evidence of their first having belonged to Chattisgarh†. It seems not unlikely that the Baigas retreated into the hills round Chattisgarh after the Hindu invasion and establishment of the Haihaya Rajput dynasty of Ratanpur, which is now assigned to the ninth century of the Christian era. Sir H. Risley states that the Binjhias or Binjhwars of Chota Nagpur say that their ancestors came from Ratanpur twenty generations ago. Baigas of Mandla are also known as Bhumia, which is only a variant of Bhuiya, having the meaning of lord of the soil or belonging to the soil. It would be quite natural that a branch of the Bhuiyas, who settled in the Central Provinces and were commonly employed as village priests by Hindus and Gonds should have adopted the name of the office, Baiga, as their tribal designation. The name Baiga also means a sorcerer or medicine-man. The above discussion on the origin, antiquity and racial affinities of the Baiga leads us to the following *conclusions* :—

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*Russell and Hiralal : op. cit., vol. II, Chapter on Baiga Tribe.

†Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. VI. p. 235.

(a) The Baiga tribe is one of the oldest aboriginal tribes of India, having links with the Kolarian, Munda or Dravidian races.

(b) The tribe had its glorious past when some of its members were small rulers of big zamindaris and that they were driven into dense forests by Hindu invaders.

(c) The Chattisgarh area was the early settlement of the tribe and from there the Baigas emigrated to their present Region.

(d) The tribe has racial affinities with other neighbouring hill tribes like Bhumiyas of Orissa, Bengal and Bihar and Binjhwars and Bhainas of Madhya Pradesh.

(e) The emigration and present settlement of the Baiga suggest that their culture is an example of survival in isolation.

Tribal Divisions

Every Baiga when asked of his caste will first call himself as Baiga or Dawar (local name for Baiga), whatever his sub-caste may be. The Baigas, thus, owe primary allegiance to the tribe itself. But the tribe is further divided into a number of sub-castes which in their turn are sub-divided into septs. Colonel Ward* and Colonel Bloomfield† were the first to record the broad divisions (jat) of the Baiga tribe. Russell gives a list of seven sub-divisions or sub-tribes : Binjhwar, Bharotia, Narotia or Nahar, Raibhaina, Kathbhaina, Kondwan or Kundi and Gondwania. Of them Binjhwar, Bharotia and Narotia were best known in the days of Russell. Both Colonel Ward and Russell do not mention the name of Bhumia in their list. It appears that the Bhumias had not gained separate entity from the Bharotia. Elwin has added three more sub-sections to the list : Kurka Baiga, Sawat Baiga and Duhd-Bhaina. 'These sub-sections have probably arisen from inter-marriage with other tribes'‡ or secession by a prominent Baiga with some following.

The tribe is strictly endogamous but admits women of other tribes on certain conditions. Each sub-tribe is further sub-divided into a number of exogamous septs the names of which are identical in many cases with those of the Gonds, as Markam, Maravi, Netam, Tekam etc.

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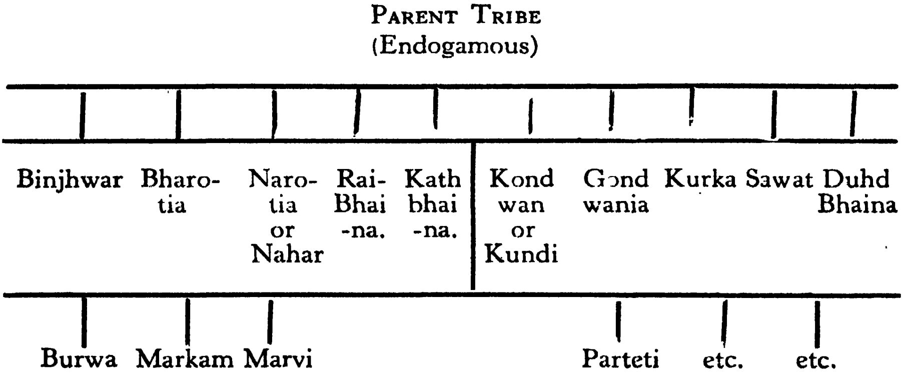
*H.C.E. Ward. Report of the Land Revenue Settlement of the Mandlah District, 1868-69 (Bombay 1870), p. 154.

†Colonel Bloomfield's 'Notes on Baigas'.

‡Elwin, opt. cit. p. 5.

Baigas have begun to forget the meaning of sept names and no instances of totemism are known. Some Hinduised sub-castes like Binjhwars and Bharotias have now adopted territorial names for their septs, a Lapheya from Lapha Zamindari, Ghugharia from Ghugri village in Mandla. The adoption of Gond names appears to indicate that formerly Gonds were freely admitted into the tribe and even now a Gond girl marrying a Baiga becomes a regular member of the community. But Binjhwars and Bharotias are strictly endogamous within the tribe.



The different jats occupy separate blocks of the tract. Consequently local environment, both geographical and social has influenced their habitat and economy. The section which has been in isolation from Hindus or Gonds—like the Baigas of the Baiga Chak or Kawardha or Pandaria Zamindari, has retained its tribal characteristics more than that which has come into regular contact with Hindus and Gonds, like the Binjhwars and Bharotias of Niwas and Jabalpur tehsils. Each sub-caste (jat) claims superiority over the other and cites myths in support of its claim. However, some distinctive features of different sub-castes may be noted with benefit. The Binjhwar Baigas are most advanced of all the sub-castes and dress like Hindus, use the plough and observe some Hindu feasts and customs. An offshoot of the sub-tribe known as Binjhwar tribe, live in the Chattisgarh plains and own lands, etc. They maintain a separate entity and are not to be confused with the Binjhwar sub-division of the parent tribe. The Binjhwar Baigas have mainly settled-down in Baihar, Mandla, Niwas, Jabalpur and Rewa. The Bharotia live mainly in the interior parts of the Baihar tehsil, south of the Motinala-Kanha-Kisli zone. Some of them also live in the Baiga Chak where they carry on shifting cultivation. The Bhumia, most characteristic of the Baiga tribe, live in Dindori (Baiga Chak and its northern boundary), Pandaria, Kawardha. They are sturdy, wild and yet most typical of the simple and honest section of the tribe.

Hunting, Bewar and root-collection are the mainstay of the Bhumia. The Narotia are mainly found in the Baihar tehsil and sometimes seen living separate from other Baigas. They bear some affinity to Bharotia in culture, but consider the latter as rough and rustic. The Bhaina Baiga—an offspring of union between Baiga and Kawar—live in Bilaspur and Rewa. They are further sub-divided into three sub-sections—Dudh-Baina and Kath-Bhaina and Rai-Bhaina. They are as wild as the Bhumia in appearance and habits. The Gondwania and Kondwan sub-caste is mostly found in the Balaghat district. They are considered of lower status for they eat monkeys and beef which other Baigas do not. The former as shown by their name are probably the offspring of union between Baigas and Gonds. Similarly the Kondwans apparently derive their name from the tract south of the Mahandi which is named after the Khond tribe and was formerly owned by them.

Appearance—Physique—Personality

Baigas are a fine manly race. His almost nude black figure, sturdy looks, well chiselled body, long tangled hair locks hanging like pendulum on the left shoulder, rough but as refreshing in appearance as the forest in which he lives, mark him out atonce in any crowd gathered in a weekly market of the tribal tract. Though rustic in appearance, he is extremely mild, hospitable, a humorous, simple and large-hearted friend. He is a rare example of finer qualities embodied in a rough frame. He has a good build. Rocks and forests have made him hard like rock, and courageous like the 'king of the forest'. It is a pleasure to meet a Baiga whether in youth or ripe in age. He is conscious of his physique and personality. Chota Baiga of Basania (Dindori tehsil) village proudly asserted, 'Give me a good dress and I will also look like an officer'. The old do not accept defeat because of age. Many of them are active even at eighty. The Sal tree, ridge or stream keeps his story of adventure, romance or hunt, green. Jhumaria, an old Baiga of Kanha village who had touched 100, jumped upright and flashed his axe in the air while narrating the tale of rail-laying in the Nainpur division. Baiga has better looks and possesses finer physique than his brother tribesman, the Gond. Unlike Gond his head is longer, features are eagle like, but the hands are comparatively small. The hair is black and thick and long on the head, but generally speaking scanty elsewhere. As no survey has been made of their anthropometric characters, it is difficult to describe their physical features with accuracy. However, Elwin divides them into two categories—the first type has a long head, high cheek bones, a fine pointed face, pointed chin, small almost delicate nose not depressed at the root, narrow eyes and straight eye-slits. lips of medium thickness, and a slightly emphasized under jaw. The second type is marked by a square head, and much coarser features. The cheek bones are not so high, the nose is large with wide nostrils and is slightly depressed at the root. The eyes are larger, the lips of medium thickness but coarser, and there is a marked retreating chin*.

Dress

The wilder Baiga is almost nude except a lungoti with a flap which hangs down in front. It is a traditional belief of the Baiga to wear less. But the more civilised sections among them now wear a dhoti, shirt or bundi or jacket and a turban, like the Gond or Hindu cultivator. In cold, they tie a thick double cloth, known as Kapchi, round their shoulders. The Baigas of Niwas. Baihar and Mandla tehsils have adopted the ordinary villager's dress. However, the Baiga women are more fully covered even in the wilder tracts. They wear a long strip of cloth commonly known as Kapra or Lugra tied round the waist, carried up across the breasts and fixed in at the back end. The strip does not reach even the knees. A Baiga woman is known by the way in which her single garment is arranged so as to provide a safe sitting place in it for the child. The Baigas usually do not use footwear of any kind. They believe that it will render their feet soft and thereby disable them for quick walking in the forest or climbing trees and rocks. Blankets or other woollen clothes do not form a part of their clothing. In the cold season they sleep round the fire kept burning or smouldering all night, stray sparks from which may alight on their tough skins without being felt. For protection from rain, the Baiga wears on his head a sort of indigenous umbrella (known as Chattri) made of bamboo frame lined with Mohlain leaves. Sometimes they also wear wooden slippers which keep them slightly above the mud. For carrying money or tobacco Baigas use purse (Basui or thaili) made of yarn or sambhar skin. Pissai (pouch with strings) is a sort of hold-all for smoking materials.

Personal Decoration

Though a forest-dweller, the Baiga is not devoid of aesthetic sense. Even men wear ornaments. Iron or silver bracelets (chura) on wrist. ring on fingers, earrings and sometimes a necklace of beads are the common ornaments of the Baiga youth. The older one sdiscard ornaments with the advancing age. But the taste for decoration finds full expression at the time of dance when the dancer's turban is decorated with a Kalgi of peacock's feathers and Chutta of gay-coloured beads shines on his neck. Paijan (anklets) tinkle on the ankle. A younger Baiga will not miss a

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*See Elwin: op. cit. Pp. 9—11.

Hawel at the dance party. The Baiga women wear the Dhar (ornament for ear) without chains or a Tarki (lac faced ornament for ear) may be inserted in its place to keep the whole of the ear lobe open. Absence of nose-ornament is distinguishing feature of a Baiga woman. A necklace of vari-coloured beads called Chutta, the Sutia, a large round silver tore, the Hawel, a necklace of silver coins or Kanthi, Latkania, Guria Bichuli—decorate their necks or the upper part of breast. Rings and bangles are also commonly used by the younger Baiga women. On the feet Chura, Tinkor or Pairi and Chutki on the toes are also worn. Local tastes and the influence of other tribes and visits to bazars greatly affect their choice of ornaments. The Baigas including men take extraordinary interest in tending and dressing their hair. Males are in the habit of either wearing it long or shave a little beyond the forehead. But in both the cases the rear part is allowed to grow and tied into a long Jura hung usually on the left side of the shoulder. More civilised among them have begun to shave like ordinary villagers or keep a small Chutti like Gonds. But no barber can touch a Baiga's head for it is a tribal custom to shave one another with an indigenous razor supplied by the local blacksmith (Agaria). Women do not shave but allow their hair to grow as long as possible. While dressing, they divide it in the middle and give two or three knots before folding them upwards. The folded locks are hung to cover the neck. Young girls put two or three combs—as symbols of others admiration and love for them. Hair is cleaned with ash or a special kind of sand; then ghee is applied to make it glossy.

Some writers have described the Baigas as 'filthy in their persons and negligent of personal hygiene.'* It is probably believed that on account of Baiga's belief that tiger would kill him if he takes a bath, he does not use water except for drinking. But the guess is erroneous for it is only the use of water after defecation that has been discarded and not for bathing. Personal observation on the other hand has convinced the auther that the Baigas keep as clean as any other tribesmen or rural people and in some cases look cleanest of all their neighbours. The youth are more particular about their appearance and clean looks. With increasing contact with other tribes and Hindus both Baiga men and women bathe every four or five days. But in their morning toilet they are probably more regular than any other tribe. The Baigas, however, wash their clothes at about once a month with fine wood-ash. Frequent washing is avoided lest the clothes would wear out soon. There appears to be, therefore, some relation between new mode of clothing and skin diseases. A Baiga in his traditional half-nakedness is, therefore, less vulnerable to skin infection.

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*A. J. Lawrence : Report of the Land Revenue Settlement of the Bhundara District p 54.
Thompson: op. cit., p. 39.

A Baiga girl in front of her hut.

Tattooing is very common among the Baiga women. But it does not signify anything except an ornamental and decorative device. These marks, it is believed, are the only things that are certain to go with them to the grave and beyond it. Tattooing is performed by a Badnin whom the Baiga call Godnaharin. The Baiga also prepare the ink with cast skin of a snake and some Til powdered in Ramtilla oil. The needles are purchased from the nearby bazar. Upto marriage the cost of tattooting is borne by the girl's parents which does not exceed one and a half rupees. After marriage the cost is paid by the father-in-law and it increases, as legs, thighs and breasts are also tattooed.

Food & Drink

Food has significant place in Baiga's physical and social existence and in his myths. Baiga is primarily a food-gatherer. Therefore, all his activities veer around food and the incessant quest for it. Myths and social norms considerably determine the kind, quantity and preparation of food. And yet Baiga's staple food is most primitive, simple and suited to his economic conditions. Pej, a sort of gruel prepared of Kutki, Kodon* or rice mainly satisfies his hunger. Though it is a base and foundation for other food, the proportion of grain to water is 1 : 7. Kodai is a sort of porridge (Kichree) made of husked and cleaned Kodon and forms a part of the evening diet. The staple diet is, however, supplemented with leaves, roots, tubers, fruits and at times fish and meat. Leaves, which may exceed even 20 in variety are boiled with a little salt and chillies. A large variety of roots also enters his diet either in the boiled or original form. Among fruits mango, Jamun, Char, Tendu, Bel and Gular are very common in the Baiga's diet. Fish is not taken regularly, but whenever the Baiga women or children get a good catch, the delicacy is definitely enjoyed by the whole family. But Baigas relish meat diet immensely. Almost any kind of meat is acceptable. Meat is first boiled and cut into pieces for curry or fried in ghee or oil. Even the skin, and the entrails are not left out. Fowls, chickens or eggs are also very much liked by the Baiga. Usually the chickens are reserved for sacrificial purposes, but eggs are used for curry quite often.

Baiga's daily time-table of food starts with a light drink of Pej early morning at about eight—called Juara.† The second meal is taken in the noon and consists of Pej-known as Marriya. Then in the night Biyari is taken which includes a slight variety Bhat, (Kodai), Dal or vegetables. Children have no fixed time nor the number of meals in a day. But women follow men's routine and usually take their meals after the elders. Baigas do not usually drink milk but prefer to prepare ghee. However, children sometimes get their privileged share and mix it in Pej. Wherever an Ahir* is a Baiga's neighbour (as in some villages near Khatia and Tatri) Baiga women get buttermilk from the Ahir's house and mix it in Pej or vegetable.

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*Coarse grains—Kodon (Paspakum Scrobiculatum), Kutki (Panicum psilopodium).

†Juara—Breakfast.
Marriya—Meals at noon.
Biyari—Evening meals.

The very savour of Mahua liquor makes the Baiga almost wild. Besides its ritual and social significance, liquor has a special charm for the Baiga. Except a few, all are habituated to drink and will avail any opportunity irrespective of the distance of the liquor shop and condition of the purse. They do not consider it a part of their regular diet, but claim for its nutritional value. For example an old Baiga of Ufri said, 'For us liquor is what the ghee is for you'. Liquor is, however, not drunk with or after food nor is it considered a substitute of food However, scientists like Prof. J. B. S. Haldane, are of the opinion that country liquor supplies many of the deficiencies in the ordinary gram diet†.

Chungi (a smoking pipe of leaves) is an inseparable companion of the Baiga. Three or four are tucked in his turban or loin-cloth or one is put over the ear. It is a device for relaxation, stimulation for work and recognised medium of friendship. There is no limit to the number of times a Baiga smokes—a chain smoker as he is. Laughingly a Baiga remarked, 'We smoke just as we breath unknowingly'. Smoking is more than a habit with the Baiga—it is a part of his physical existence.

Social Institutions

The Baiga tribe is divided into endogamous groups known as *jat*. Since each *jat* has occupied a separate block of country, there is little chance of inter-marriage between any two *jats*. There are, however, certain areas in which the problem is not so simple as two or more than two endogamous *jats* live as neighbours. In such places the social relationship among different groups is governed by a set of rules, Bhumia, Binjhwar and Bharotia may interdine in Rewa, Mandla and Balaghat. In Dindori and Niwas Binjhwar may eat at the hands of Bhumia and Muria, but nowhere else. Similarly Bhaina Baiga eat food served by Bhumia and Binjhwar sub-tribe in Bilaspur. Similar restrictions regarding dining are in force in different

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*A caste of cattle breeders

†Quoted in Grigson's Report, Pp. 318-119.

A Baiga showing dried meat of Sambhar

Baiga
Mukkadam of
Dhaba village

areas which further sub-divide the septs for purposes of dining. But no where woman of one *jat* is permitted to eat at the hands of any other *jat*, for the Baiga believes that woman is the custodian of *jat's* purity, which if once spoiled is likely to affect the future generations. But inter-marriages are not uncommon. Member of one *jat* can marry the virgin girl of another *jat* provided the girl severs all her connections with the parents and their relations. The rules of inter-marriage vary from one region to another, strictness or flexibility in their observance largely depending upon local customs, inter-divisional relations and the influence of other tribes and Hindu castes.

The *jats* are further sub-divided according to their garh* and got†. They believe that originally each group belonged to a particular territory, hill or jungle and that they must give their girls to the people of other territory. Garh is a territorial division of the jat and constitutes an exogamous sept. There are mainly twelve garhs—Binjhwar, Sawat, Chituria, Damgharia, Ghangaria, Dawaria, Pachgaita, Salgaia, Kumaria, Massania, Chanania and Chandgaria. But these garhs are not observed strictly now. Due to the influence of Gonds who have no territorial exogamous divisions, Baiga seem to have taken to the got system. Main gots are—Marawi, Dhurwa, Markam, Parteti and Tekam. Sagotra marriage is not permitted, but breach of the rule is well atoned with a bottle of liquor to the elders. It will be safe to say that in recent years all rules regarding got and garh have become loose and are not strictly observed in any part of the Baiga Region. Although Baigas have adopted the totemic gotra system of the Gond, there is no real totemism among the former. One may hear some reference to totemic faith in certain villages or families. But in general the Baigas are not a totemic tribe.

Baigas do not observe untouchability but they are still very particular about their food and drink. They will not eat with any other tribe or Hindu caste. Even a touch to their water or cooking utensils is not welcome. But exception is made in case of dry food, fresh fruits, tobacoo or milk. During our tour Baigas accepted oranges, lemon drops and tea, sugar and *biris* without any objection. Unmarried boys and girls enjoy more liberty. But a married woman must observe all the rules regarding food and drink. On the whole there are now two schools of thought among the Baigas—one insisting upon maintaining tribal purity by strictly observing the rules of marriage and dining, and the second believes in liberalising tribal rules so as to broaden the jurisdiction of the tribe. A compromise is invariably arrived at in the form of a penalty feast to the tribesmen whenever there is a breach of these rules, and the irregularity is then treated as legalised.

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*Territorial sub-division of the tribe

†Sub-castes.

There is no material difference in the kinship system of the Baiga and the Hindu castes. It is of the usual classificatory type. Baigas hold their relatives in great respect and whenever any relative pays a visit he is well received and given a feast with liquor. A peculiar custom prevalent among Baigas may, however, be noted. Baigas allow cross cousin marriage and marriage of grandparents and grandchildren and other relations who belong to these generations*. But it does not mean that Baigas have no code of avoidances. A girl must avoid her husband's elder brother. The husband must avoid wife's elder sister. Married couple must avoid jokes, abuse or dirty stories before parents or parents-in-law.

Baigas' social code prescribes penalties for the breach of tribal laws. A husband who has taken a girl of another 'jat' must pay the penalty of a dinner to his jat. In Niwas, however, the penalty is severer. The husband must atone by sacrifice of goat, chicken and the communal feast. Baigas do not take the breach of 'got' very seriously, as it has been borrowed from Gonds; but it is difficult to marry within the same 'garh'. Similarly, the kin-incest is definitely looked upon with horror by all the Baigas. Illegitimate sexual relationships within the family are major crimes punishable with fines, feasts or offerings to God and penance. Their general belief is that such incests are punished by God through disease, death or break up of the family. But generally, these days common punishments are awarded by the Panch** even for major crimes. Baiga's old attitude of strictness towards kinship relations is undergoing change due to the disintegration of his tribal compactness under the pressure of Gond and Hindu influences.

Birth

Birth of a child is not a social event in a Baiga family. It is a travail for the mother but it does not create any stir in the village. Baigas believe it to be a re-birth of some ancestor of the family in the person of the newly born child. The parents, therefore, wash its feet with water which has some silver in it and then drink it. The Gunia† is called to find out who this ancestor is. The child is shown ornaments of ancestors to recognise, or the parents are asked to scratch their memory to find the resemblance with any ancestor. When the 'jiv'‡ is discovered, a name is given to the child by the mother's father or maternal uncle, after cutting his hair. The name is taken from the month or day of the week or from some physical peculiarity of the child. Like Hindus Baigas have also bad or good omens about the child. Being illiterate and orthodox they, however, believe in omens more than the Hindu castes. For example, there are many magical charms and practices to make the child happy and prosperous in the future. To enable him to walk sooner, dance well, shoot with accuracy, various devices—herbal and mythical—are adopted by the women. For certain physical disabilities like dumbness, weak legs or deafness they use magic and make offerings to the gods. To increase the mother's milk or to bring about artificial lactation Baiga women use milk medicine prepared of Dudhibel creeper.

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*J. H. Hutton in his Foreword to Elwin's 'The Baiga'.

**Elder of the Panchayat.

†The Priest and Sorcerer.

‡Soul.

Marriage

Marriage has great economic and social significance for the Baiga. It involves payment of 'bride-price' and increases family expenditure. The parents must save for paying the 'bride-price' and the youth should work more vigorously to prove his capacity to support his wife. Admission of a working adult to the family adds to the labour—power of the family and probably results in an increase in the family income. It is thus an incentive to thrift and economic progress. Socially, it gives a new status to the boy and girl both. Boy's social status requires recognition at the hands of elders. The girl has also her position among the village women. In fact marriage opens a new phase in the social life of a Baiga.

Generally a Baiga does not take a girl from his own goti and garh. But the rules of exogamy are not always observed. He may marry within his mother's sept, and in some localities the union with first cousin is permitted. Marriage is for adults, more frequently soon after puberty. There are very few cases of child marriage among the Baiga. As among Hindus, marriage must be preceded by Sagai (betrothel). The boy's parents and relatives go to the girl's parents with some gifts of cloth, bangles, coconuts, liquor etc., and obtain the latter's consent for betrothel. The girl's father offers liquor to family gods and approaches his daughter to know her wish. In most of the cases the girl already knows her prospective husband and says 'yes'. Girl's decision is final. The village celebrates Sagai along with the boy's party. There is a system of 'bride-price' known as 'sukh' which is settled by the boy's and girl's parents. It ranges between Rs. 10/- and Rs. 25/-; part of it is paid in kind and a part in cash. At the time of payment the boy's parents give a feast known as Bharoki. The date of wedding is usually fixed on the occasion of this feast. Baigas usually do not celebrate their marriages in the months of Jeth and Pus when they are busy in the preparation for sowing. The wedding procession starts from the bridegroom's house and is received by the bride's father outside the village. It is essential that he should go out to meet the bride's party riding on an elephant. But since a real elephant is not within the means of a Baiga, two wooden bed-steads are lashed together and covered with blankets with a black cloth trunk in front. The elephant makes pretence to charge and trample down the marriage procession, until a rupee is paid, when the two parties embrace each other and proceed to the marriage booth. Here the bride and bridegroom throw fried rice at each other until they are tied together, and then walk three or seven times round the marriage post with their clothes tied together. The chief actors in the marriage ceremony are the two *dosi* and the two *suasin*. The former are usually old men, father or uncle of the bride and bridegroom ; they perform most of the religious rites. The latter are young and unmarried girls, sisters or cousins of the bridal pair. Feasting, drinking and dancing mark the occasion and send the whole village into wild marry making. At most marriages gifts are made at the time of '*tikawan*'* by the bridegroom's father to the brides paternal grandmother, to her mother, to her brother, to the *dosi* and the *suasin*. A large variety of songs known as Bilma and Birha are sung by the women.

A Baiga can have a full-dress legal marriage only once in his lifetime. All other marriages are of secondary type, although no social stigma attaches to them. Widows are remarried under haldi-pani rite.† In some cases a divorced wife may also go through it to get a second husband. The system is also known as 'Churi-pairana'. In this case ceremonies are simple, cheaper and quicker. A little of liquor, turmeric and a few bangles complete the list. The husband puts bangles round his wife's wrists in the presence of elders and friends, and the woman becomes his. But if the woman had absconded, the new husband must pay a compensation to her previous husband. The amount of compensation depends upon the expenditure incurred by the first husband at the time of his full-dress marriage. In the case of a poor boy whose parents cannot pay 'bride-price' or incur marriage expenditure, the boy serves from two to five years in his would be father-in-law's house. He is called Lamsena or Gahania—the man who is in 'pawn'. He becomes a member of the family, and receives food and clothing. After the completion of the period, he is married to the girl, of course, in a simpler way. But if the girl rejects him or runs away with another

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*Farewell to marriage party.

†Widow marriage or second marriage of a deserted wife.

A Baiga woman cooking pej.

Baiga women going to the forest.

man, the Lamsena is paid a compensation of three years' service, varying from Rs. 40/- to 60/-.

Polygamy has social sanction in the Baiga tribe. Economic and sexual considerations sometimes prompt a Baiga to marry two or even more than two women. For example Pharki—the famous Baiga liquor contractor of Dhurkatta (Dindori tehsil)—had six wives at a time. Another Baiga of Dudhania (Baihar tehsil) has still three wives. But according to the 1931 Census polygamy is on decrease among the Baiga. People talk jocularly about those who keep more than one wife, but the practice does not lower down the social prestige of the husband in any way. However, there are very few cases where polygamy has proved successful. Ultimately it breaks up the family and becomes a source of trouble. Divorce may be effected by the husband and wife by breaking a straw in the presence of the panchayat. If the woman remains in the same village and does not marry again, the husband is responsible for her maintenance and that of her children, while a divorced woman may not remarry without the sanction of the panchayat so long as her husband is alive and remains single.

Death

The Baiga 'seem to be more afraid of the cause of death than of death itself' because he regards death as unnatural. Witchcraft, ghosts, and spirits or the breach of tribal taboos—are regarded as the real cause of death. Various methods of divination are used by the Gunia to find out the cause of death The funeral rites are very simple among the Baiga. The dead body is given a bath, anointed with oil and turmeric and finally wrapped in a new cloth. While women lament and scream, the male relations prepare a bier on which the body is laid. Then four men carry it away avoiding the main paths, down to the stream if the cause of death is to be discovered by divination at the river bank or otherwise direct to the burial ground. If it is a case of sudden death, he is buried, for they believe that if they burn him the wind will carry infection to the village. But if the person has died after a long illness, they burn him. A grave is made waist deep, and the head is towards the south. The dead man's hasia*, supa**, tuma† or khanta‡ are put near his grave. In the case of a man of importance two or three rupees are thrust into the mouth of the dead, and if his body is burnt, the coins are recovered from the pyre by his daughter or sister, who wears them as an amulet. Over the grave, a stone is erected or a small circle of stones is created known as Bhiri. The Bhiri of the deceased is worshipped by his relatives in times of trouble. At a funeral the mourners take one black and one white fowl to a stream and kill and eat them there, setting aside a portion for the dead man. Mourning is observed from two to nine days, and during this time labour and even household work are stopped, food being supplied by the friends of the family. On the third day, the mourners assemble and bathe with the members of the family and drink. The ceremony is called Tijnahawan after which the normal household work is resumed. On the tenth day there is Daskaram* on which a feast of goat and liquor is given to the tribesmen. The burial or cremation ground is generally on the boundary line of the village and people avoid passing through it. When a person is killed by a tiger the rites are very elaborate and a *gunia* is engaged to lay the dead man's spirit at rest and at the same time to prevent the tiger from doing any further harm.

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*Sickle.

**Winnowing fan.

†Gourd.

‡An implement for digging.

Festivals

The Baiga are a gay people. Though apparently cut off from the outside world, they have a world of their own in which festivals and ceremonies are not lacking. Baiga festivals are not so much associated with their religion as is the case with Hindus. Their festivals are in response to the harvest, season and local customs. Baigas, however, observe some Hindu festivals too, without understanding their religious significance. Most of their celebrations consist of offerings to gods, feasting, drinking and dancing. On the whole their festivals are more a recreation than worship. The Dassera, which falls in October, is quite an important festival in the Baiga villages. But it is not associated with any Hindu rites or religious beliefs. Its importance is mainly due to the Bida ceremony associated with it. During this month rains end and the invigorating season sets in. Village parties exchange visits and organise dance performances on reciprocal basis. In the hope of getting a good crop, Baigas indulge in heavy drinking. Saila and Rina dances are common features of the festival. In March Phag† celebrations are observed. 'It is not for the gods. It is for men.' A Baiga will not miss the opportunity of drinking during the Phag. Village centres and liquor shops are surrounded by well-drunk Baigas at this time. Hareli‡ is observed in the early period of the rains. The goddess of crops—Kutki Dai—is worshipped on this occasion, to ensure a better harvest. Pola* follows Hareli after two months when Baigas burn some twigs near a stream, believing that the smoke will take away disease from their village. At the end of the harvest the Nawa feast—Harvest Thanksgiving—is celebrated. New rice is offered to Thakur Deo** and some is tucked on the doors. For the first time new rice is cooked in the house not by any woman but by the head of the family who has to keep fast on that day. The children have their own festivals. During the month of January children enjoy Cherta feast. They put marks on themselves and dress up like Sadhus and collect some grain from every house. The party organises a picnic at river side where girls cook for them. Feast and fun is the order of the day. Gonds and Hindu castes have exercised cultural influence on Baiga festivals. In some areas they observe Diwali and Holi and also participate in Gond celebrations.

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*Ceremony observed on tenth day of the death.

†Spring festival.

‡Festival of rains.

Religion†

Baigas are near-animists. They believe in a theory which regards the belief in separate spiritual existence as the germ of religious ideas. But 'the primitive belief in spirits, technically known as animism, does not imply what our philosophers and religious teachers describe as immaterial existence'.‡ Yet like all animists Baiga animism is bewildering and well-nigh incredible. 'The Baiga Pantheon is exceedingly varied and elastic. It differs from village to village. There is no exclusiveness about it. The Baiga naturally worships everything he can, in order to be on the safe side'§. An instance of Baiga's pantheism may be quoted. On one occasion when the train of the New Satpura Railway had pulled up at a wayside forest station, a Baiga was found offering a sacrifice to the railway engine. A Baiga thus worships every god that he has ever heard of. But his special concern is for his tribal gods. The principal diety is *Bura Deo* who is supposed to reside in the Saj tree. He is worshipped in the month of Jeth (May) with the sacrifice of goats, fowls, coconuts and some liquor.†† The legend goes that Nanga Baiga took him (Bura Deo) to the forest and put him in the stump of a Saj tree. Baigas, therefore, never cut the Saj down to the ground but always leave a stump.

'*Thakur Deo* is the god of the village land and boundaries, and is propitiated with a white goat. The Baigas who plough fields observe a ceremony called Bidri*, which is performed before the breaking of rains. A handful of every kind of grain sown is given by each cultivator to the priest (gunia), who mixes the grains together and sows a little beneath the tree where Thakur Deo lives. After this he returns a little to each cultivator who sows it in the centre of the land on which crops are to be grown, while the priest keeps the remainder. This ceremony is believed to secure the success of the harvest. Land is considered the wife of Thakur Deo.

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*Festival associated with village sanitation.

**Main God of the Baiga.

†Based on Elwin's 'The Baiga', Pp. 1-78.

‡R. H. Lowie : 'An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology' p. 306.

§Elwin, op. cit. p. 54.

††Russell & Hiralal ; op. cit. Vol. ii, p. 85.

Baigas worship *Dharti Mata,* or Mother Earth, for it is believed that they were born from her womb. Their cult of bewar (shifting cultivation) itself is based upon the belief that to plough is to lacerate the breasts of Mother Earth. Dharti Mata is worshipped at the Bidri ceremony. No Baiga will drink liquor without first offering a few drops of it to Dharti Mata. Earth is considered mother over much of the world.† And there is no wonder. the Baiga who is ordained by Bhagvan to be close to earth, regards her as his mother with love and gratitude.

Dulha Deo is the god who averts disease and accident, and the offering made to him should consist of a fowl or goat of reddish colour. *Bhimsen* is the diety of rainfall. 'He is the Falstaff of Baiga mythology.' In some places he is worshipped with Thakur Deo. He is given some incense at the time of Bidri and a red cock and a red chick when rains are scarce. The Baiga erect a pole and build a platform in honour of *Gansam Deo* who is believed to be protector against man-eaters. The pole is decorated with black, and red lines and at the top are peacock's feathers and a red flag. When wild animals are troublesome, a shrine may be built for *Baghesur Pat* and a mud image of a tiger placed inside it. *Narayan Deo,* though a Hindu God, is also worshipped by the Baigas. A pig is offered in a ceremonious way—known as Laru Kaj. Nag Deo or the Cobra is supposed to live in ant-hills and offerings are made to him there. Then there are household gods in addition to the tribal gods. Some of them are —Aji Dadi, Ratmai, Panharin, Satdhari, Maswasi, Suttibhavani, Kolin Sotti, Kansatur Mata, Lohasur Mata. The spirit of Baiga religion can be best described in the words of Elwin. "Now the essence of Baiga religion is to mobilise these forces of neutrality or benevolence against the forces of evil. Baiga religion is not a dogma, it is a war. The Dewar or gunia is not so much a priest as a warrior. He is a noble and heroic figure, fighting a desperate battle against the unseen powers of disaster and disease. His allies are great guru and the more benevolent dieties ; these he must keep friendly by worship and reverence. His enemies must either be defeated outright by the power of his allies or propitiated by himself. Here is a new reading of his religion—a great battle that divides the supernatural world, that calls out the noblest of mankind to give themselves to the historic task of saving their fellows from the invisible and unknown"*.

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*Ceremony observed at the time of sowing.

†'The Golden Bough', (Abridged Ed.) Pp. 434-37, by J. G. Frazer.

Baiga Mythology

'Often the main function of myth is to serve as a foundation for a system of magic, and whenever magic forms the backbone of an institution, a myth is also to be found at the base of it. In this perhaps, lies the greatest sociological importance of myth, that is, in its action upon institutions through the associated magic.' The myth is a 'narrative of events', "The socially sanctioned narratives of these events, the traces which they left behind past of their supernatural powers, the social institutions which are associated with the practice of this magic—all this brings about the fact that a myth is for the native a living actuality, though it has happened long ago."† What Dr. Malinowski wrote about myth in 'Argonauts' life, is also true of Baiga's social life. Baiga's origin is traceable to a myth, his powers of magic and knowledge of herbs and roots have mythical origin. Bewar cutting‡ has mythical sanction behind it and most of his social customs and practices are based on mythological beliefs. 'For the mythology of the Baiga is the central power-house of the life and energy of the tribe............It is their motive power and their authorisation'‡. Myths are not mere interesting tales for the Baiga but a living reality. They are not even small events of the past to be narrated by the aged. Myths determine his superior social status, they endow him with powers to propitiate gods for the wealth and prosperity of the tribe, mythical belief leads him to dine with the Gond-his younger brother, and again he lives in the forest because he believes his ancestor was ordered by Bhagwan to live on roots and tubers. A Baiga faces the tiger with more confidence than any other tribesman for 'he knows that the duty has been his from the beginning'. Poverty does not demoralise him. Hand to mouth living is not the Baiga's shame but his giory bacause his ancestors, Nanga Baiga and Baigin chose 'to be poor and live close to the earth'. The influence of mythology on their morals was finely explained by a Gunia of Baihar tehsil.' We perform the services of a Gunia as our "dharm" and not for profit.' Their secial relations, dances, dress, diet, occupation, mode of life, festivals and rituals--all and one are influenced by their mythical beliefs and notions. Our wanderings in the Baiga region fully convinced us of Dr. Elwin's remark, 'These myths then are no mere fairy stories not just primitive attempts at a scientifie explanation of things. At every point there is the closest contact between them and the daily life of the tribe. To the Baiga they are the records of veritable happenings which set the social order on its course, instituted tribal law and established him in his unique position as Bhumia Raja, lord of the earth'.

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*Based on Elwin's 'The Baiga' and personal conversation with some old Baigas of Dhurkutta and Piparia villages of Dindori tehsil.

†B. Malinowski ; 'Argonauts of the Western Pacific', Pp. 303-304.

‡Dr. Verrier Elwin ; 'The Baiga', p. 305.

Origin of Earth

According to the Baiga mythology the entire world was originally nothing but water. Only Bhagwan was there sitting on a lotus, leaf. One day he felt the loneliness of his existence and created a crow his daughter—Karicag—out of dirt of his arm, and asked her to find earth out of which he proposed to make a world. The Karicag flew and flew in search of earth. Completely exhausted she fell on the back of Kekramal Chattri, the great tortoise, and told of her mission. The tortoise took her to Logundi Raja who with the help of Laharsur, Tamesur and Agyasur got an iron cage constructed. Kekramal and the Karicag got into the cage and Logundi Raja lowered them down to the bottom of the ocean where they met Gichnaraja (worms at the bottom of the ocean who was believed to have swallowed the earth) sleeping deeply. On being disturbed in his sleep Gichnaraja got angry and a quarrel ensued between him and Kekramal. The latter jumped on to the worm and seized him by the neck. The myth goes on that the Gichnaraja vomitted twenty one times as a result of which 21 kinds of soils came into existence. After getting all the earth from the worm, both Karicag and Kekramal re-entered the iron cage and were lifted up by Logundi Raja. Karicag brought all the earth to Bhagwan. He called a young virgin who churned the earth for eight days and nine nights in leaf-pot. Bhagwan prepared a sort of Chapati out of it and spread it on the face of the water. But it was found weak and slippery like mud. Then wind—Pawan Daseri was called to make it dry and hard. Yet the work was not perfect--earth was seen tipping up on its sides. Then came Bhimsen, the great giant, who tried to make earth even and well balanced. But inspite of Bhimsen's efforts the earth still wobbled.

There is no single story of Nanga Baiga's birth. Local legends, accretions and Hindu mythology have brought about many variations—in the Baiga mythology. However, it is generally believed that the Nanga Baiga and Baigin were born on the Kajli-ban pahar (Hill of elephants) where they ate roots and played in a pit. The year passed and they grew up. One day they couplated and started living as wife and husband.

Power of Magic & Controlling wild animals

Once upon a time there lived seven Samuduria Sisters beyond the seven seas. Youngest of them once went out in search of guru. While wandering on the shores of sea, she saw Nanga Baiga and touched his feet. Asked about her desire the Samuduria Sister said, 'Kindly bless me with a child'. Nanga Baiga said that it was easy and the girl went home with a child in her womb. She disclosed the story to her sisters who grew jealous of her when she gave birth to a son after twelve months. The youngest again approached Nanga Baiga for food. Nanga Baiga brought some roots and twigs to eat which made her feel better again. One of the Samuduria Sisters could not tolerate all this, and being well versed in witch-craft, she put ban on child birth throughout the world. And it was so. Nanga Baiga and Nanga Baigin through their *Supa** and *Tuma*** respectively found out as to the mischief of the Samuduria Sisters and offered them a pig and two coconuts, and child birth was resumed again. Now 'when a woman has no child, the Baiga looks in his *Supa* and if he sees those six jealous Samuduria Sisters dancing there, he knows that it is they who have done the mischief.'†.

There is another myth which confers the powers of Pashupati‡ on the Baiga. Once Mahadeo and Parvati lived in a long separation of twelve years. Tired of it Parvati many times sent a tiger to trouble Mahadeo whom she expected to come frightened. But Mahadeo did not move—instead he asked the Baiga to kill the tiger. Nanga Baiga killed that tiger and buried him under a bunyan tree. But the tiger soon regained life by suckling milk of the bunyan tree. Nanga Baiga attempted to kill the tiger second time. But the tiger entreated him to listen to him 'Whenever I catch man, goats, cattle and chickens in a village, all the people will call on you to help them. You won't get gold or silver—that is for the Hindus. But wherever you do your magic in a village or forest, there I will never come, and the people will trust you and will give you enough for your livelihood." Thereupon he let the tiger go. By chance a Gond was killed by the tiger soon after. Nanga Baiga was called to protect the village and was offered a goat, some liquor and two coconuts. He made two little images 'One of the sin that had killed the man, the other of the banaspati††. The barua‡‡ entered into him and he trembled all over. He leapt in the air and caught hold of the Sin-image.'

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* Winnowing fan.

** Gourd

† Elwin ; op. cit. p. 327.

‡ Lord of animals.

†† Lord of Jungle.

‡‡ One who diagnoses disease.

It was proved that the man eaten by the tiger must have committed some sin. Then Nanga Baiga drove four nails into four trees in four directions and said to himself, 'O Dharti Mata, O Banaspati, today I, Nanga Baiga, have fixed the boundary of this village. I, Nanga Baiga, make it free from every kind of tiger'. And the story goes that from that day Nanga Baiga has been 'Lord of all wild animals' the true Pashupati. As a result, the Baiga faces a tiger with courage and confidence. He is aware of this mythical superiority over other tribes.

There is a myth of death, too. Bhagwan wanted Nanga Baiga to make room for other jiv* in this world. But he could not kill him. Instead he made the sensation of itching and Nanga Baiga scratched, scratched and scratched till his whole body was torn into small bits. Yet Nanga Baiga did not die, then Bhagwan turned himself into a cobra and bit him. Nanga Baiga thus died of cobra bite. While dying he asked his sons to cut his body into pieces, boil and eat them. The sons were following their father's instructions. Then Bhagwan appeared before them in Sadhu's disguise and advised them to throw the pot in which the human flesh was being boiled, into the river. They did as desired by the Sadhu and threw the pot into the river. 'But a little of the stream escaped from the pot and entered the nostrils of the youngest son, and he became the first gunia.* Down the river, three women ate Nanga Baiga's flesh and became witches'.

Language

Linguists and ethnographers generally believe that Baigas originally spoke a Kolarian language.† But after the invasion of the Aryans, they lost all the traces of Austro-asiatic languages and adopted the language of the Aryans. They had forgotten their own language while they were living in the Chattisgarh plains. And their subsequent migration to the Satpura hills introduced new words, phrases and style of the languages of neighbours. 'Baigani' is now recognised as a corrupt form of Chattisgarhi‡—a mysterious mixture of Marathi, Hindi and Gondi. It is not surprising to find some Sanskrit words in it. Mr. Grierson has described the Baigani language as follows, 'Baigani is a corrupt form of Chattisgarhi, but is freely mixed up with words and idioms taken from other languages, including on the one hand Gondi and on the other Bundeli. From Gondi it borrows a portion of its vocabulary, and from Bundeli, the most noticeable idiom which is borrowed is the occasional use of the Agent case with *ne* before a transitive vary in the

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*Elwin : op. cit. p. 61.

†Dr. J H. Hutton in his Foreward to Ewlin's 'The Baiga'

‡Census Report, C.P. Berar, 1931.p. 312

A Baiga village in plains.

Baigas felling trees for Bewar.

past tense. The language of a Baiga is full of the syllable *na*, repeated over and over again as a kind of expletive.'* As Baigani is a fusion of many languages and dialects there is no such thing as a standard Baigani. In fact today the Baiga speak the language of their neighbours. In Bilaspur area they speak Chattisgarhi, in Mandla and Jabalpur area Awadhi Hindi, in Balaghat they talk a mixture of Marathi, Hindi and Gondi.

Village Site

Shifting cultivation leads to shifting of villages. As a result, the Baigas of old days were constantly on the move. Consequently one does not find those notions and traditions in the tribe which go to build permanent, elaborate and settled villages. Yet a Baiga has an eye for a good site. Luxuriant growth of forest suitable for *bewar* will, no doubt, attract him most. He is not devoid of aesthetic sense too. Kanha, a crow's nest over the famous sanctuary ; Kasaikunda, almost hanging on a ridge, and Jalda with a garland of streams and lovely greenery would make an artist wild in joy. A typical Baiga village will usually be found either on a hill top like Piparia not easily accessible to aliens or buried in the heart of some dense forest like Dhaba or on the bank of a perenial stream like Jhilon in the Baiga Chak.

To carve out the village site in the midst of a dense forest or rugged hills, Baigas clear a strip of land about 20 to 25 yards broad as the boundary of the village. This boundary has administrative as well as social significance. It demarcates the site to be recorded by the Government officials. The burial or cremation ground is usually on the boundary. The Gunia—priest—drives away disease or wild animals beyond this boundary. And the marriage and dance parties are received on this line.

A Baiga village is built either round, square or rectangular. The three sides are covered by rows of huts and the fourth half covered with leaves, is an entry to the village. Where the even surface is not long, the houses are split into two squares as in Dhurkatta of the Baiga Chak. If the population exceeds the normal number, a new *tola* is built up 4 or 5 furlongs away from the main *tola* as in Piparia (Dindori tehsil) which has 7 tolas. The number of huts in a predominantly Baiga village usually does not exceed 20 or 25. A cattle shed known as *Sar* is within the square and is generally adjacent to the hut where the cattle could be watched against the attack of wild animals. Outside the square, there is a gardenland known as *Bari* in which all the refuse

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***Linquistic Survey of India, Vol. VI, p. 235.**

and dirt of the house and *Sar** are thrown away. Being well manured it gives a good crop of tobacco, maize and certain vegetables—a precious possession of the Baiga providing his favourite tobacco and variety to his dish. Unlike other tribes there is no house for gods, nor bachelor's dormitories or corporate houses, or special granaries. Often a platform is constructed in the middle or on one side of the square where grain, tobacco etc. are dried in the sun. In some important villages a small hut known as Chatti– divided into two small rooms—is set up for travellers and officials and is looked after by the Kotwar. It is invariably located outside the square and away from the village.

In sanitation and general cleanliness, the Baiga village stands on par with, or at times excels, other tribal or rural villages in the State. Viewed in its setting of forest or ridge, it has definitely a better appearance. If the Baiga has an eye for village site, he is in no way less careful in preserving its social beauty. A typical Baiga village is a well-knit fabric of social life. Life throbs with freedom, equality and corporate loyalty. Discipline is observed spontaneously. Where Gond culture has influenced the Baiga, this solidarity and serenity has been disturbed as in Niwas and Baihar tehsils. They then, build houses in separate compounds.

The Baiga House

Baigas have a nomad's attitude towards home. Since beginning they have been in the habit of changing village sites. A new village site had always meant a new house. Therefore, the tribesmen cannot think seriously of building a permanent house. The result is : a Baiga house looks very simple, carelessly built and loosely thatched. The walls are unplastered, floors un-even and partitions irregular. A few wooden poles, bamboos, thatching grass, fibrous bark, cow-dung, mud and a little white earth—are all that is required for building a Baiga house. Although the material is available free of cost to the majority of Baigas, a Baiga house is definitely less attractive than that of his Gond neighbour. The Gond house has well plastered walls, it provides separate rooms for cooking, eating and sleeping; while the Baiga must cook, eat and sleep in the same place. Where the Gond influence is strong, Baigas have adopted the Gond style of houses. But a typical Baiga house is neither comfortable nor well built. Usually it is a big rectangular room partitioned into two apartments by grain bins in the middle. On the one side is the cooking hearth and a little space for utensils and household articles nearby. On the other side of the grain bin are : a stand for water-pots, a hearth for light and warmth. There is a verandah in front of the room with a grind stone on one side and

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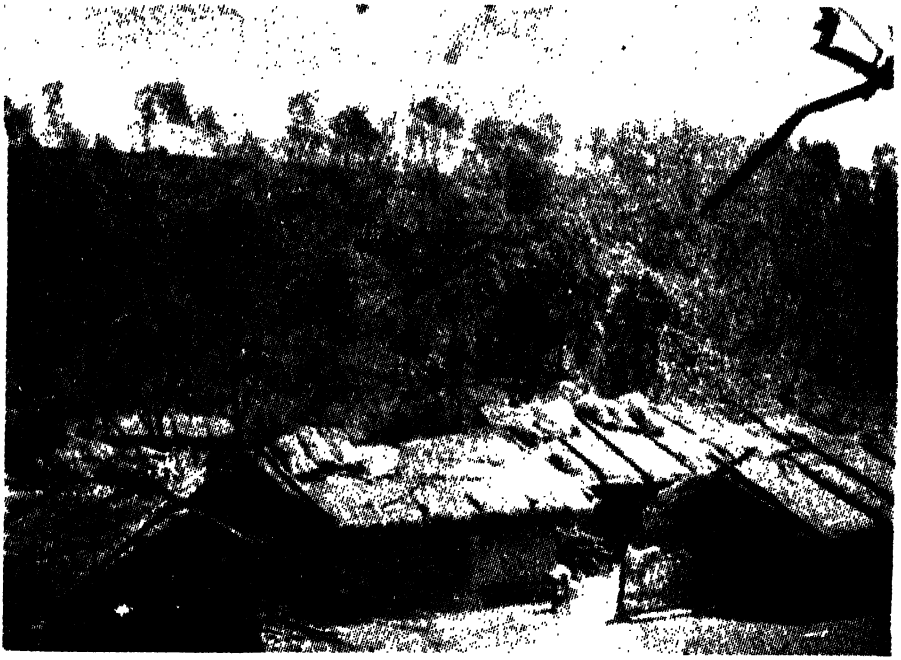
*Cattle-Shed.



The site of Jhilang village in Baiga Chak.

The site of another Baiga village.

a rice-husker on the other. The *Sar* is attached to the hut where cattle and poultry are sheltered. But where father and married son live together, additional rooms are constructed or the verandah is extended and thatched into a room to accommodate the old parents. Every Baiga has a Deosthan* behind the hearth in the inner room. It is only a place and no godlings are to be seen there. Outsiders are permitted to enter the first room but Baigas show some hesitation in permitting an entry into the second. A typical Baiga house has no doors. Instead, a frame of split bamboos slides to and fro on a horizontal bamboo fixed in the gap of the wall. In some mixed villages Baigas put wooden doors and also use a lock. But they have no iron or wooden boxes. Most of the articles, edibles, clothes, nets, implements etc., are hung from the roof which becomes black with smoke. 'Such is the Baiga home, dark, cosy, smelling enternally of wood smoke and food cooking, a place of warmth and affection, not a permanent abode, but a good tent on life's journey.'†

*A place for family god.
†Elwin, op. cit. p 36.

CHAPTER IV

BEWAR CULTIVATION

'Just how and where mankind fell into the custom of planting and cultivating may always remain a matter for speculation'.* Various theories have been proposed and botanical, zoological and archaeological evidences have been cited to prove the origin of agriculture. But there is a good deal of discrepancy in these theories. Therefore we accept C. Wissler's counsel that none of these theories be taken seriously until the data essential to such conclusions are available†.

However the general concensus of opinion among anthropologists is that early man was a foodgatherer.‡ He collected fruits, leaves, tubers and roots and killed wild animals to satisfy his hunger. His sole dependence on nature taught him a lesson that he must conserve some natural food to meet the emergency of food scarcity caused by drought, flood or fire. In the beginning he might have preserved some dried roots or meat to tide over the periods of scarcity. Later on he extended the practice further. He began to domesticate wild species. Thus agriculture came as a shift from wild species to domesticated forms. Lowie rightly observes, 'The outstanding thing about agriculture, however, is not this or that clever device. What counts is that every single cultivated species of any importance goes back to illiterate peoples......the simpler folk turned the trick of bringing them from the wild into the cultivated state'.§ Thus we owe immense debt to the forerunners of plough agriculture, namely hoe-culturists—who were a link between the generation of food-gatherers and plough cultivators. These dibblers and hoe-gardeners with their simple tools and in their most primitive condition laid the basis of our economic life by initiating the era of agriculture. Let us therefore consider the main features of hoe-culture which Baigas carried on in olden days.

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* Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences Vol. 1—2, p. 572. See also N.I Vavilov: 'The Problem of the World's Agriculture in the light of latest Investigations' Kniga (England) Ltd., 1931. Quoted in 'Plough and Pasture' by E. Cecil Curwen.

† Encyclopaedia Britannica, Chapter on Agriculture.

‡ Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, Vol. 1— 2, p. 572.

§ R H. Lowie: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology (New Edition) p. 31.

Characteristics of shifting cultivation

The variety of soils, of climates and of cultivation are responsible for many types of agriculture existing in the world. The patch agriculture of the tropical forest without draught animals and hoe cultivation prevailing in many parts of the globe are characteristically the most primitive among all the types. In tropical regions a tribesman cuts the undergrowth to make a small clearing in the forest. Either he leaves out the bigger trees or fells them or burns them. At the end of the dry season or just before the beginning of the rains he fires the cuttings and with the aid of hoe, digging stick or dibbler plants shoots, tubers and roots or broadcasts seeds of cereals and millets. After raising two or three crops he shifts to another site where the fertility of the soil has not been exhausted. But primitive agriculture is not migratory everywhere. Where annually flooded river plains are available for cultivation the silt borne by the inundations often suffices to maintain fertility for long periods. Patch or migratory agriculture or shifting cultivation is, however, almost universally found where cultivation is dependent on direct rains alone.*

The agricultural implements employed by a primitive cultivator are extremely simple and are made mostly out of locally available material. They are no more elaborate than a digging stick, hoe and axe—just to dig holes for seeds or to cut the undergrowth and trees. There are certain areas, where the iron axe or blade has not come into use even now and ordinary wooden sticks are used for drilling holes for seeds.

The primitive cultivators are universally found to supplement their stock of cereals and fruits with hunting and fishing. Where agriculture is mainly carried on by women, men are free for these pursuits. Where, however, the intensity of agriculture is high and absorbs a greater proportion of the community the importance of hunting and fishing declines. On the one hand the spread of agriculture reduces game, on the other it leaves very little time and energy in the male for hunting. Nevertheless, hunting and fishing are the usual source of supplementary food in the primitive communities. Where this instinct is suppressed, it finds expression in the shape of domestic animals for food supply or tending of pets just to satisfy the urge.

The sociological implications of primitive agriculture are equally significant. Among root and fruit cultivators we do not find a fairly uniform level of civilisation distinct from grain growing people. There is less permanence and security in the life of the former and therefore less chances of steady social progress. Climate, topography and vagaries of nature introduce heterogeneity in their culture. Their technique of production is crude. They live a hand to mouth economy. The different operations in primitive agriculture are usually not initiated by an individual. In selecting seed, choosing of the time of sowing and harvesting, the decisions of the community as a whole direct the operations. The leader or priest of the village organises planting and harvesting ceremonies and propitiates Gods for the protection of crops and prosperity of the village. 'Primitive agriculture', as described by Clark Wissler 'is a co-operative effort in which the community as a whole participates'. It has promoted culture not merely by providing food to the primitive, but is also responsible for closely knitting and disciplining humanity itself by bringing individuals together for observing rituals and ceremonies connected with agricultural operations. Let us therefore examine the mythical basis of Baiga's shifting cultivation known as Bewar.

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* For shifting cultivation in foreign countries and different parts of India see Appendix.

Mythological foundation of Bewar

To a Baiga shifting cultivation is not merely a means of livelihood but a tribal duty and responsibility with which he believes, he has been charged by the Supreme Power. For him it is an article of faith providing energy to his whole existence—'the symbol of their tribe, differentiating them from all others'. Thus goes the legend :* When the world was firm, Bhagvan told the Baiga to go back to their 'Kundmul jungle, the hills where you dig your roots, but return after eight days'. Bhagvan then went to the bazar and opened a shop at which he gave plough to the Gond, pen to the Brahmin, bottle to the Kalar, pair of scales to the Bania, fishing net to the Dhimar, loom to Mahar and the Pankas were told to watch the village. But the Baiga did not get anything for he had not turned up. However when the Baiga returned from the jungle, Bhagvan called all the tribes together to make them a King. All of them occupied gold and silver chairs, but the Nanga Baiga squatted down on the floor. Then Bhagvan took him by the hand and made him sit by his side on his throne, and said, "You are to be king over all the world." But the Nanga Baiga said, "No, make the Gond King, for he is my brother". So Bhagvan blessed the Gond with the promise that they should rule as kings over the world, but he gave a greater blessing to the Baiga. "All the kingdoms of the world", so said Bhagvan, "may fall to pieces, but he who is made of

*Elwin : Op. cit Pp. 317-318

earth and is Bhumiaraja, lord of the earth, shall never forsake it. You will make your living from the earth. You will cut wood and carry it on your shoulders. You will dig roots and eat them. *You must not tear the breast of your Mother Earth with the plough* like the Gonds and Hindus—you are to cut down trees and burn them and sow your seed in the ashes. But you will never become rich, for if you did you would forsake the earth, and then there would be no one to guard it and keep its nails in place".

'Then Bhagvan showed Nanga Baiga how to cut Bewar and sow seed in the ashes of burnt trees. When he had taught him everything, he called him to receive a gift of seed. There was a big pillar in the middle of Bhagvan's house, and Bhagvan stood behind it. When Nanga Baiga came for the seed he stretched out his hands, one on either side of the pillar. and joining them made a cup into which Bhagvan put the seed. But then, when Nanga Baiga wanted to withdraw his hands he had to separate them. and a lot of the seed fell to the ground and was lost. Then Bhagvan laughed mightily, and said, 'You have lost so much now in the beginning that you will go on losing your seed and harvest to the end of the world. It is good", so said Bhagvan, "that it should be so, for only the poor will ever be content to be servants of Dharti Mata."*

However opinion is divided on the extent of the hold which the legend has now over the tribe. According to Elwin who has spent nearly twenty years among Baigas 'this legend is told, and believed, throughout the length and breadth of the Baiga country......in the old days it was the foundation of the economic and social life of the tribe†. In Pandaria and Kawardha, and in wilder parts of Bilaspur Baigas expressed their religious and mythological beliefs about the danger of lacerating the breasts of Mother Earth and the evils of plough cultivation. However opinion is now growing that whatever hold the myth had in the past is now loosening and at present the Baiga do not mind taking to plough. Personal tour of the Baiga land and friendly discussions both with the old and young Baigas revealed that they are fast forgetting the legend of the Bewar. This was so not only in the Baiga Chak where incessant anti-bewar propaganda has been carried on since 1867, but also in other areas of the Baiga land. Generally, Baigas do not narrate the legend in support of their right of cutting bewar. But the sub-stratum of the mythical belief can still be seen on a slight scratching. Narrate the legend before a group of older Baigas—shame and sorrow will cast a gloom over their faces. They will move closer to you—in convincing serenity they would nod their heads and say, 'Bhagvan gave us Bewar, but the sarkar* has taken it away. What can we do'. And soon the wiser among them explain, 'Without Bewar we are starving. It was the only means of livelihood for us for the soil below in the valley is barra†. It does not give us a good yield. Poor as we are, we have neither good ploughs nor cattle to improve its fertility nor enough seeds to sow'. The late evening of May 20th, 1952 with Baigas of Dharkutta is still vivid in author's mind. About thirty old Baigas had collected, all over 60 years, representing practically every village of the Baiga Chak. A friendly conversation on Bewar had filled the whole atmosphere with warmth and appreciation. Each one of them was entreating the author to support their demand for Bewar. Bir Singh, the Baiga Mukkadam of Dhaba—the oldest among them—had gone to the length of saying that the whole tribe would ever remain indebted to him if he could get some more Bewar for them. This clearly shows that the urge for Bewar is not dead altogether among the traditional Bewar-cutters. They yearn for it even now- but a feeling of helplessness and indifference has overcome them, most probably due to repeated unsuccessful attempts at regaining their 'freedom of the forest'. Slowly Baiga is shifting his emphasis from theological sanction to economic necessity of Bewar-cutting.

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*Russell and Hiralal give different version but confirm the fundamental of the myth that it was Burra Deo who taught Baiga how to cut trees and do Bewar cultivation. See 'Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces' Vol. II p. 79. Also 1931 Census Report C.P. & Berar, Volume I, p. 404.

†Elwin. Op. cit. p. 107.

Baiga technique of shifting cultivation.

Since the system of tribal or clan leadership is not prevalent among the Baiga, a forest patch for Bewar is selected on the basis of unfettered choice. However, in actual practice elders make a final selection. In olden days Baigas had full freedom to cut and burn any forest patch for sowing Kodon and Kutki. But now the officials of the Forest Department give out a particular patch in forest villages without any regard to a Baiga's choice. When a Baiga is, however, free to choose any patch for Bewar, certain factors influence his decision. The distance of a Bewar plot from the village will certainly receive first priority over other considerations because a very long distance involves waste of time as well as energy badly needed for clearing, and burning the forest and watching the crop. Distant plots also require his wife to travel a long distance for taking *pej*, etc. to her husband. Moreover, Bewars near the village can be better protected against wild animals. A Baiga will, however, not mind the distance of three to four miles if other factors favour the site. Usually a patch of dense growth is preferred as its vegetation lasts two or three burnings and its fertility is not exhausted sooner. Commonly Bewars are on steep and almost precipitous hill slopes at comparatively high altitude. To an outsider it may appear slightly against commonsense, for it involves more expense of energy and also allows the ashes to flow down. But the Baiga—traditional axe-cultivator as he is—is not so ignorant of the economics of his job. There are climatic reasons for choosing high places. The Sal tree once cut in lower altitude regions can only reproduce small shoots, which are destroyed by frost. Since frost comes as early at the middle of November, the Baiga's crops, which are late ripeners, must be sown where they will not be attacked by frost. Baigas, therefore, choose the Bewar site well above the line of frost where the sal can freely reproduce.* Crops are comparatively safer on a high plateau against wild animals than in the low valleys—the natural abode of the wild life. Baigas prefer slopy areas as their experience shows that the growth of the weed is less dense on slopy places than on the level land. After the hard labour of cutting and burning the trees, a Baiga either relaxes for some time or joins hunting and fishing parties. Being half-cultivator, he does not get time for frequent weeding. Naturally he chooses such a plot where weeds do not grow very densely. He is expert in selecting the patch for he is fully familiar with the surroundings. In fact Baigas are considered the oldest tribe of the State and as such they often decided in the past disputes regarding boundary lines.† In paragraph 126 of his Bilaspur Zamidaris Settlement Report Wills described how in 1866, when the first Settlement began there were rough tribal boundaries between village and village and the traditional limits of the lands within which each village could practise Bewar cultivation were accurately known to villagers, especially to the village Baiga or priest. In some villages where one patch of forest is not enough for all, more patches are chosen for a number of families.

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*Government

†Barren Soil

After selecting a big forest area or a number of patches Baigas used to demarcate their family plots. But these days, it is the officials of the Forest Department who actually measure and divide plots among the families. Since Bewars are in the name of the head of the family, cultivating right is inherited by the son of the deceased in case the occupant dies before the Bewar is abandoned. Disputes regarding distribution of the Bewar plots among Baigas are practically unknown. They have a wonderful mutual understanding among themselves.

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*See Mandla District Gazetteer (1912) Pp. 73-74.

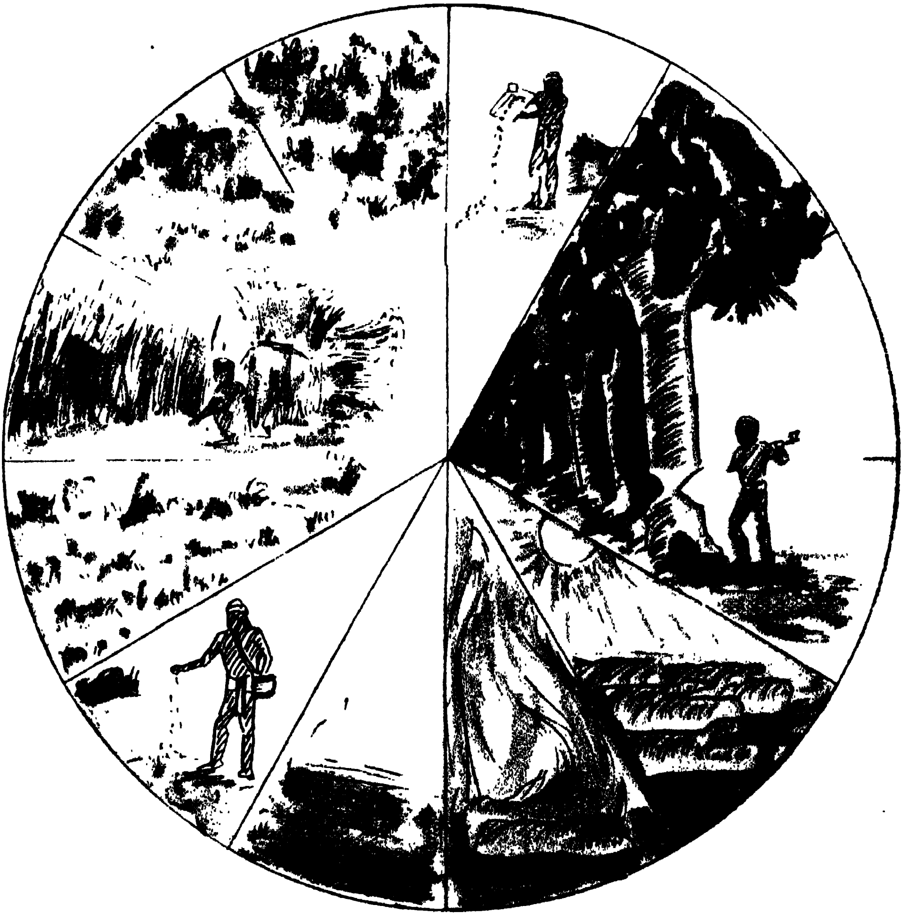
†See Colonel Ward's Mandla Settlement Report (1868-69), p.153.

When questioned about the occurrence any dispute regarding boundary of demarcation, they laughed at the very idea. For they cannot contemplate any quarrel among the residents of the same village over such matters. Nor do they draw any specific boundary lines of their plots. Only a few stumps of big trees are left at the time of clearing the forest just to indicate the boundary of the adjacent Bewar.

Many factors influence the area of a Bewar plot. If the surface of a patch on the slope is irregular, naturally larger area will be cleared to raise a minimum amount of grain for the family. The denser the vegetation, the smaller will be the area of the plot. For luxuriant growth, when cut down, even on a smaller plot, provides enough ash manuring. Besides, in subsequent years the regeneration is more quick over such patches. The size of the family and the number of working adults in it also determine the capacity of the family to clear the forest. Given liberty to fell forest, the greater the number of working adults in a family, the larger will be the area of its Bewar plots. Distance of Bewar from the village also affects the area of Bewars. If the patches are nearer the village, less area will be available for clearing due to pressure of increasing population. But in the more interior parts of forests, wider area is available for cutting and burning. However, all these factors have now ceased to operate as the Forest Department decides the forest area which the aborigines can clear for Bewar cultivation. Though Baigas are allotted Bewar plots in the Baiga Chak, they have not even a rough idea about the area of their plots. Nor does the Mukkadam's Village Note-Book show any record of the area. Other registers also show only the number of Bewar plots permitted in a village and not their area or situation. However, enquiries in Ajgartola, Dhurkatta and Silpuri in the Baiga Chak revealed that on an average the plots were 10 chains long by 4 chains broad. Some plots are still smaller – 8 chains by 5 chains. In Jalda Boana the plots were of a bigger size. In the Pandaria Zamindaris—now merged in the Bilaspur District, Bewars were far stretched due to the fact that vegetation on these hill slopes is extremely poor and the shifting cultivator has to clear a larger area in order to raise the required quantity of foodgrains. Thus, the area of Bewar plots is irregular wherever shifting cultivation has been permitted and there is no standard size of the Bewar plots in any region surveyed.

In the month of January the Baiga lifts his traditional axe for felling down the high, often straight and canopy Saj and Sarai trees. His mythical faith, pride, zeal and wood-cutting skill are at their best when he fells trees, for he believes that he is fulfilling the mission assigned to him by Bhagvan. It is here that he feels himself different from other tribesmen, for he is not lacerating the breast of Mother Earth. In olden days Baigas

CALENDAR OF BEWAR CULTIVATION.



performed a ceremony before striking at the first tree. Elwin describes that when the family members have found a suitable site, they take some rice and throw it over a tree in the middle of the new Bewar, and fell it with a single stroke of the axe. The head of the family takes a leaf from the tree, folds it in four, and ties it with the stump of the tree. This is accepted by other Baigas as an evidence of the occupation of the plot. But our enquiries from Bewar-cutting Baigas disclosed that the ceremony was generally not observed these days. The stopping of Bewar and its confinement to a limited area has brought about an end of the ceremony. Even where shifting cultivation is permitted, for example in Jhilon of the Baiga Chak, they have not been allowed to fell trees for many years. Thus, there are fewer chances to celebrate the occasion and thereby keep it a living practice. The ceremony has died out, it seems, not because of Baiga's indifference towards it, but due to the reduction of the Bewar cultivation throughout the Baiga land. Though the institutional side of the ceremony is gone, its spirit can still be seen when a Baiga goes to the forest for striking his axe at the first tree. The whole atmosphere is permeated with respect and offerings to the Almighty for He permitted the Baiga to cut Bewar and eke out his living.

Generally, Baigas do not fell down all the trees in the forest patch, provided there is a dense growth on it. First of all, they will cut the whole grass and brushwood. This work is done by men and women both and even by children. It takes two or three days to remove the grass. The second stage in the clearing process begins when smaller trees and the branches of bigger trees are lopped off. Women and children assist men in this work too. It is thrilling to see the whole family working in the midst of greenary with buoyancy on their faces. The hardest part of the clearing work is to cut down the heavy trunks. This is the third and final stage. Baiga's sturdiness and real skill are on trial. Incessantly for hours he goes on striking his axe against the massive wood. The whole valley resounds with *Khat Khat* of Baiga's *tangiya* (axe). The Bhumiaraja goes almost wild for he is working on a job of his choice. The bigger trees are not cut from the root. Stumps —3 to 4 feet high are left out, around which creepers of *barbati* (millet) climb up. The stumps may also sprout at the second cutting. Some thick stumps are also left out to indicate the boundary of the plot. Two implements, namely *tangiya* (a keen edged small axe) and *hansia* (sickle) are used for felling trees and clearing grass and brushwood. The felling period lasts from 20 to 30 days between January and February. In olden times Baigas observed a ritual before felling the trees—'they worshipped their axes, promising Kutki Dai or Anna Dai (Goddess of harvest that if the crop was good, they would make special offerings at the harvest time. They turned the axe with the blade downward, and recited over it a short *mantra* invoking the aid of Nanga Baiga and Nanga Baigin. Then they went to the Bewar. Before felling trees, they offered a coconut to the jungle dwellers, whose home they despoil and then they proceeded to fell all the trees within the area chosen, leaving stools about a foot high.* But personal observation showed that like the ritual observed at the time of selecting the forest patch, this ceremony was also neglected by the Baiga. Probably diminishing importance of Bewar in Baiga's life is responsible for the negligence of most of the religious ceremonies connected with Bewar cultivation.

Where the Bewar is used for the second time, the felling work is neither so hard nor so prolonged. Only the sproutings of stumps, and the regrowth of grass and brushwood are cut and collected around the stumps. In the third year the work is stopped, for the soil is generally exhausted by that time and there is not much regrowth after two burnings.

After finishing the arduous work of felling big trees and clearing grass and brushwood the Baiga retires for a short rest and leaves the logs and other cuttings for drying during the months of March and April. For recreation and also to supplement their stock of food Baigas go for hunting and fishing during this period. However, the women and children and at times the men, too, go to the Bewar for collecting grass and brushwood around the big logs. The latter half of April and May are the hottest parts of the year and the cuttings soon dry up. Between the end of May and beginning of June the dried trees and the entire cuttings are set on fire. The old practice was to kindle fire first near the originally felled tree and thereafter each member of the family would burn a bamboo and set fire to the different sides of Bewar. According to a myth they are forbidden to kindle the fire with flint and steel; it must be kindled by twirling a bamboo stick in a hole made in another split bamboo. But it is doubted very much whether Baigas these days observe the sanctity of the first felled tree or observe the taboo of kindling fire with flint and steel. Enquiries made at Dhurkatta and Silpuri confirmed that these rituals or taboos connected with Bewar were losing their hold on the tribe.

The dried logs and undergrowth burn in four to six days. Since the heavy trunks are covered with grass and cuttings they do not take long time to burn in the hot month of May. Within two or three days ashes cool down. Generally ashes are not spread, for cuttings are already

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*Elwin op. cit. Pp. 109.

Fire set to felled trees in Bewar.

distributed over the plot evenly. However, in olden days when they felled trees over a wide area and the vegetation was quite dense, they did spread ashes with the help of bamboos or with brooms of thorns. The practice is still prevalent in certain areas. The Maria Gonds of Bastar, whose technique of shifting cultivation is an improvement over the Baiga's, spread ashes evenly over the soil with an instrument like a squeegee. The ashes are ploughed into the ground after the first fall of rains in Maria land.* However, Baigas do not use such elaborate methods. In fact, they are not very conscious of manure value of the ashes. Since most of the Bewars are on steep slopes, ashes are washed down by two or three rains. Whatever little remains sticks to the soil and forms clogs around the roots of plants, or is ploughed into the soil with a digging stick-*Khanta*—at the time of sowing seeds of *Ahrar, Bhurta or Sanai*.

Sowing

The Bewar plot is now ready for sowing. After the first rains, preparations for sowing start in right earnest. Sowing is inaugurated with the performance of a ceremony namely *Bidri*;† a sort of propitiation of Dharti-Mata for bestowing good crops. Thereafter, actual sowing starts. Men and women fill up baskets with mixed seeds and where men use dhoti, its corners are filled up. Baigas do not allot separate plots or distribute a plot for different crops. Rather the whole plot is treated as one farm and a mixture of all grains is sown. The seeds of Kodon and Kutki are broadcast without any consideration of distance between the plants. Both men and women participate in the work. Although Baigas do not know the approximate area of the Bewar plot nor have they any idea of the effect of close or sparse sowing, yet they are able to calculate the quantity of seed required for each plot. Without any set standard or measurement they arrive at the necessary quantity of seeds in a rough way best known to themselves. In normal times most of them are able to save seed from the previous year's crop. Personal observation revealed that Baiga families took special care in preserving seed for the next crop. It is true they do not attach any importance to the quality of seeds, yet they take all possible care about the seeds saved for the next crop.

After broadcasting *Kodon* and *Kutki*, Baigas again wait for a couple of days for more rains. When the soil is sufficiently wet, Baiga and Baigin come out on the Bewar again to dibble holes in rows for *arhar* in the middle of the Bewar plot and on its boundary lines. The Baiga makes holes with *Khanta* and the Baigin drops seeds—usually three in each— and covers them with earth raked with the toe of her foot. The third round of sowing begins with dibbling of beans and cucumber seeds around the stumps of big trees. Their creepers climb up these stools and spread on their support. Other crops grown on Bewars are *Sanva, Mandia Juar,* various pulses, castor, gourds and brinjal. But the main crop is the *Kartikia Kutki* known locally as *Bari Kutki.* Nearly 60 per cent of the Bewar area is covered with it as Baigas have a special liking for *pej* prepared of *Kutki.*

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*Grigson : 'The Maria Gonds of Bastar,' p. 126.

†A brief description of the Bidri ceremony and its mythical significance is given in Chapter III.

Ten or fifteen days after the sowing, the seeds sprout and cover the ashes with green saplings. Within a month the same scortched earth turns into a green lawn in the midst of thick forest shadowed by cloud ridden sky. Soon wild grasses and roots raise their heads often over and above the *Kutki.* Baiga is aware that wild growth will obstruct the growth of *Kutki* plants and therefore starts removing it in the latter half of the second month. The second weeding is done in December or January. The number of weeding largely depends upon the intensity and speed of wild growth and the labour power available in the family. Usually two weedings are done all over the Baiga region. Weeds are removed either with hand or *hansia.* Women and children play important part in the weeding work. Every family clears weeds on an individual basis and there is no cooperative effort in this work. The weeds are left on the Bewar itself. In course of time they decompose and provide manure to the soil

The site of the Bewar plots--away from the village and on hill slopes--may give an impression that Baiga's crops are not carefully watched and protected against the wild animals. But just opposite is the case Baigas guard not only their own crops, but also protect others crops both against wild animals and evil spirits. Every year in the sacred month of June Baigas are in great demand to perform the *Bidri* ceremony at which they give offerings of seeds of every kind and chickens to Thakur Deo, Annakuari and Badauna Deo on behalf of the whole village and pray, 'O Raksin Mata, bring us prosperity from the boundaries of other villages. O Annakuari, make every grain into twentyone. I see these Meghraj, let the crop grow well. Let there be no hunger or thirst any more. May the grain grow even on the kutta (wooden pegs for tethering animals). Then we will know that Nanga Baiga and Nanga Baigin, with Jilandhar Guru, have indeed helped us.'*. It is widely believed not only by the Baiga but also by other

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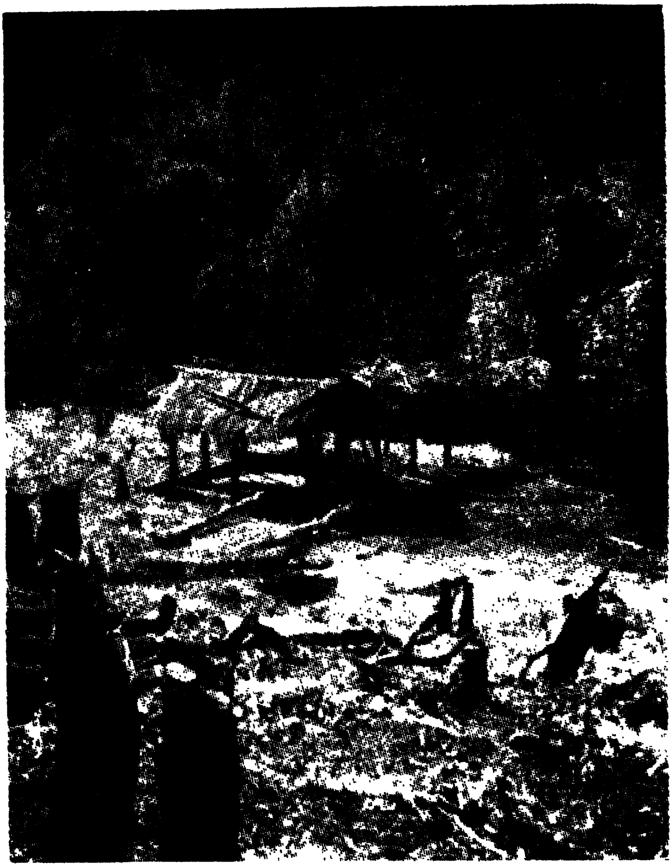
*Elwin ; op. cit. p. 356.



The Lari (watch cabin) in a Bewar field.

tribesmen that due to *Bidri* their fields will be free of birds and animals, and gods will keep off evil spirits from the fields. It brings rich crops at the end of the season. Reposing full faith in gods, Baigas do not stop their own efforts for protecting the crops against wild animals. They construct a fence around the Bewar of logs and split bamboos. In some places it is almost impregnable. Around the fence they put snares and traps for different animals. Their knowledge of the strength, height, habits and daily routine of animals which attack crops is surprising. It helps them to devise various types of snares and traps to which animals very often fall victim. One such trap is the *suri*. Two or three gaps are left in the fence which attract the animals to come inside the Bewar. On the inner side of these gaps a number of long knives and spears are fixed and some green foliage is tipped on their points giving them the appearance of a small tree. Just near them they dig up ditches and cover them with grass etc. When the animal—deer, bear or ghutri (wild goat)—jumps through the gap, its belly is struck by the spears as these are fixed so cleverly that no animal irrespective of its height and length can escape the trap. Baigas watch their crops personally, too. When the seeds have sprouted well, the whole family is in or near about the Bewar during the day time. It is only for cooking etc. that the wife goes to the village. During the night, however, the women go back to their homes, but males ramain in the Bewar. When the number of children is not large, the wife also remains in the Bewar even during the nights. But it is a taboo to remain in Bewar during her menstrual period. Baigas erect small huts of wood and grass on Bewars known as *Lari*. When raised above the ground on poles it is called *macha* or *machan*. During the night Baiga alone or with his wife watches his crops and burns big logs to keep himself warm and also to keep away animals from the Bewar. These *Laries* are temporary huts used only for a couple of months. At the end of the harvest they are abandoned. It is a common sight to see these single huts completely deserted in dense forests. In olden days some foreign travellers took them as shifting houses of the Baiga tribe and associated them with the Bewar system. In fact, they are nothing more than watch cabins for agricultural season.

Baiga is not aware of any remedy against parasite weeds, insects and pests. For example, the chief injury to which Kodon is liable is from a small parasite weed termed agia (Striga lutea). The weed has a small and innocent looking white flower. It is said to be very injurious and burns up the crop even in its proximity. Locusts also appear at intervals and cause much damage to young Kodon. Caterpillars are a constant danger to Bewar crops. But Baigas are helpless in the matter. Personal discussions revealed that they do not take any measures against insects and pests and leave it to Bhagwan's mercy.

Baigas do not observe any special ceremony before reaping the harvest. Like the Maria Gonds of Bastar the reaping process has no mythical significance. However, the old practice among the Biagas was to make a small platform for Thakur Deo and to offer him and Anna Dai the first fruits of the crop and a cock or pig, whatever they had promised at the time of felling. But personal enquiries disclosed that the ritual had now lost its hold upon the tribe.

Their reaping and winnowing processes are similar to those of other ordinary cultivators. Men, women and children reap, using small iron sickles of the type common throughout the Madhya Pradesh. Since the various grains and pulses are sown higgledy-piggledy, there is a confusion of crops on the Bewar. Reaping is therefore a selective and slow performance. Different corn ears have to be searched separately since different crops were not sown separately. The women prepare a threshing-floor in the Bewar field, clearing a piece of ground near the stacks of grain and plastering it with mud. But when the crop is very poor, the threshing-floor is dispensed with. Baigas do not use animal power in threshing the grain, as they are not habituated to use animal power either for ploughing, irrigation or transport. Men and women form themselves into a ring which goes round and round treading the corn ears with their feet. Threshing is done by individual families of their own crop and there is no cooperative effort in this work. However, unlike the Maria Gonds of Bastar, Baiga women take part in the threshing work and it is not a taboo for them to join with the males. The threshed grain is winnowed in the ordinary way. One man lifts up the uncleaned grain in a supa (Winnowing tray) (he may stand on a wooden stool if the harvest is rich and the work is heavy), while there is not wind enough, winnows the falling grain with a bamboo fan (Pankha of a bigger size). The other man is not employed if there is enough wind. The first one shakes the *supa* so that the grain is separated from the chaff. The cleaned grains are not kept in the field house. They are taken home every evening in baskets or Seeka (Kawar) by the men and by the women in the former case. Carts or pack animals are not used at all for transporting the grain from the field to the house. Baigas, doing Bewar do not celebrate any new—eating festival like the Maria Gonds. However where rice is cultivated in the plough fields Nawa feast (Harvest Thanksgiving) is observed.

The above technique of Bewar cultivation is now practised by a very few Baigas (only in the Baiga Chak) on a restricted scale. After the prohibition of shifting cultivation by the Government in 1867, the

Baiga cult of Bewar has almost disappeared. Its history is, however, described in the following pages.

Prohibition of Bewar.

The British officials knew practically nothing about the great mass of forest-covered hills of Central India until the aftermath of the 1857 Mutiny brought about a change in their policy. The rulers of India woke up and a new order of administration had its birth. The best maps at that time showed vast tracts in this region as 'unexplored'. In 1861 the change in Government policy found expression in the formation of Central Provinces as the Chief Commissionership, and Mr. (afterwards Sir) Richard Temple was appointed its first Chief Commissioner. He took special personal interest in the forests of the Provinces. One of the first steps taken by Temple was to organise a Forest Department for the detailed examination and conservation of the timber-bearing tracts. Capt. G. F. Pearson, who had travelled extensively in these regions in quest of sport, was appointed as Superintendent of Forests.* He was assisted in his work by Lt. Forsyth, author of the famous classic on Indian sport 'The Highlands of Central India'. This team of officials headed by Richard Temple surveyed the forests of Central Region and formulated forest policy for the future.† Since the views of these officials laid the foundation of forest policy of the Provinces, they may be quoted with benefit. Forsyth who had travelled throughout the Central Plateau wrote, 'Though large tracts of splendid level land lie untilled on the Puchmari Plateau, and in the valleys below, the Korku has no cattle or ploughs with which to break it up. He has nothing in the way of implements but his axe. This is enough, however, for his wants. He selects a hill side where there is a little soil, and a plentiful growth of grass, timber and bamboos. He cuts every stick that stands on the selected plot, except the largest trunks, from which he lops and girdles so that they may shortly die. By the end of May it will be just like tinder and he then sets fire to it and burns it as completely as he can to ashes.........he now rakes his ashes evenly over the field and waits for rain, which in due season generally comes. He then takes a few handfuls of one of the coarse grains he subsists on and flings them into the ashes. Such is the fertilising power of the ashes that the crop is generally a very productive one.........the second year the dead trees and half burnt branches are again ignited, and fresh wood is cut and brought from the adjoining jungle and the same process is repeated. The third year the clearing is usually abandoned.'* Forsyth's description of what followed in the train of the *dhya*† clearing is of considerable interest, since the history of the forests of this region is intimately connected with the nomadic life and modes of aboriginal tribes who have for long inhabited the area. "The abandoned *dhya* clearings are speedily covered again with jungle. The second growth is, however, very different from the virgin forest destroyed by the first clearing, being composed of low and very densely-growing bamboo, and of certain thorny bushes, which together form in a year or two a cover almost impenetrable to man or beast. In such a thicket no timber tree can ever force its way into daylight ; and a second growth of timber on such land can never be expected if left to Nature. The scrub itself does not furnish fuel enough for a sufficient coating of ashes to please the dhya-cutter, and so the latter never again returns to an old clearing while untouched forest land is to be had. Stand on any hill top on the Puchmari or other high range, and look over the valleys below you. The *dhya* clearings can be easily distinguished from tree jungle ; and you will see that for one acre left of the latter, thousands have been levelled by the axe of the Gond or Korku. In fact I can say, from an experience reaching over every teak tract in these hills, that excepting a few preserved by private proprietors, no teak forest ever escaped this treatment, unless so situated in ravines or on precipitous hill sides as to make it impossible to make clearings on its site."

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* Capt. (afterward Colonel) Pearson has recorded his experiences in 'Recollections of the Early Days of the Indian Forest Depertment' (India Forester, Vol. XXIX).

† See E. P. Stebbing: 'The Forests of India'. Vol I, Pp. 392-403.

"This system of cultivation, if it can be called by that name, was of the most precarious nature. The holding off of rains for a few weeks after the seed was sown, or when the ear was forming, meant the ruin of the crop, and then the owner was usually compelled to subsist entirely on what always largely supplemented his diet—the wild fruits and nourishing roots, with which fortunately for him the Indian forests are well furnished. As a natural consequence of this method of cultivation, the people led a wandering nomadic life. As far as the men were concerned their idea of a pleasant existence was to accomplish the minimum amount of work possible in the shortest period of time, and thus spend the rest of their days in hunting and roaming about in the forest. The *dhya* cultivation practised throughout the hills of the Central Region was almost in itself sufficient to have proved the ruin of the forests, but other causes had also unfortunately supervened. The most valuable timbers for railway construction and other purposes at the time were the teak and the Sal".‡

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* J. Forsyth : 'The Highlands of Central India', Pp. 81-82.

† A varient of axe-cultivation.

‡ J. Forsyth : Op. Cit. Pp. 82-84.

In 1859, Pearson made a thorough inspection of the forests of the Mandla Plateau and of those along the Maikal Range as far as Bhandara. He also noticed ruin of forests by burning on a large scale. The forest conservancy measures taken in the subsequent years were decided by Pearson and reflect his anxiety to save forests from *dhya* cultivation*. Richard Temple, then Chief Commissioner of the Provinces, looked at the situation from a different angle. He was more anxious to carry 'the message of civilisation' to the remotest parts of the forest lands and in his opinion the aborigines could be civilised only through plough cultivation.

By 1864-65 officials' spot observations and inspection notes and the reports submitted to the Government by the heads of different Departments had created an official opinion against the aborigines' shifting cultivation. The final decision to prohibit it throughout the Central Provinces was taken in 1867 when the Settlement Operations were carried out in all the districts. It was decided that 'according to all positive law, according to the Settlement Code and according to the custom of the country the Baiga had no title to the proprietary right or to occupancy right in the tracts over which they roamed'.†

Certain significant facts may, however, be noted which throw some light on the other side of the Government decision. The administration decided to stop Bewar before and not after the Settlement Operations. In fact, Bewar fields and all the problems connected with it were never specifically surveyed by the Government before issuing the *fiat*. The persons on whose reports and views the Government had based their policy were not forest experts. For example F.G. Pearson was a military man. In 1858, when the embers of the Mutiny were still smouldering in the country, Pearson himself said 'his principal duty while in command of this force was to patrol the country and rout out any mutineers and disaffected natives who were hiding in the hills or forests'. Another person who assisted Pearson, was Lt. I. Forsyth, Lieutenant of the 26th Punjabis. Stebbing, I.F.S., and author of a well known work 'Forests of India', describes these forest officials of early days as 'untrained in scientific forestry, but they loved the forests'. Richard Temple was prompted more by a desire to civilise the 'wild' rather than conserve the forests. Thus it is clear that the decision of stopping Bewar was taken by 'untrained' forest officials and the so called 'messengers of civilisation'.

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*See E.P. Stebbing : 'The Forests of India', Vol. I, Pp. 392-403.

†Elwin: Op. cit. p. 111.

Aborigine's right in land is also a controversial issue. According to the Government they had no title to proprietary or occupancy right in the tracts over which they roamed. But there are evidences on Government records which prove the existence of tribal boundaries of Bewar lands in the past. In 1866 when the first Settlement began in the Bilaspur Zamindaris there were rough tribal boundaries between village, and village and the traditional limits of the lands within which each village could practice Bewar cultivation. The boundaries were accurately known to the villagers, especially to the village Baiga or priest.[*] Baigas not only knew the boundaries of their Bewars, but they were also consulted by other tribesmen on boundary disputes. In Mandla the decision of a Baiga on a boundary dispute was almost always considered as final.[†] It is, therefore, wrong to presume that aboriginals had no boundary to their lands and that they had no title to occupancy right. No doubt they were used to change their areas and, therefore, did not claim any forest patch as their own permanently. But every village did recognise others boundary and there are no references to the transgression of village boundaries. There seems to be another reason for the aborigines not asserting their right in land at the time of settlement operations. Owing to internecine warfare which had preceded Britishers' advent into the Provinces, much land had gone out of cultivation ; for no one dared to lay claim to the ownship of land, since its assumption led to robbery and extortion from the owner by the chief robber who happened to be paramount for the time being in the district.[‡] Thus the political conditions then prevailing in the countryside forced many aborigines not to assert their rights in land. Besides, ignorant and illiterate as they were and are still, it was difficult for them to prove their proprietary or occupancy rights. It was too much on the part of officers in charge of Settlement Operations to expect the simple folk to come forward and establish their rights over land. An incident of famine relief of 1897 in Mandla district may be recalled when Baigas' shyness led them to such lengths that many died of starvation with relief at their very doors, overlooked by their Gond and Hindu fellow villagers, and themselves afraid to apply. It was no uncommon thing for the whole male population of a village to flee into the jungles on the approach of a relief officer.[§]

It was with the aim of civilising these 'civilisation-fearing' people that Bewar was stopped legally throughout the Provinces. The administrators were then fully convinced that 'so long as these people do nothing but grow *Kodon* or *Kutki* on *dhya* patches for their own food, so long as they produce nothing at all for sale or barter to other people ; and so long as they actually consume nothing except a few grains of salt from the outerworld, they can never improve, they can never rise in human scale, but must continue to be wild men of the woods as they are now'.* Therefore attempts were started to wean the aborigines (particularly the Baiga) from the axe during the Settlement Operations of 1867-69. This change was to be brought about not all of a sudden but to take one tract at a time, and bring these people down from the hillsides on which they roamed, and settle them to cultivate lands in the valleys. In some areas superior officials tried to regulate the speed of the reform and were anxious not to give any sudden and severe jerks to the Bewar system.

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[*] See Wills: 'Bilaspur Zamindaris Settlement Report' para 126.
[†] See Ward: 'Mandla Settlement Report' (1868-69), p. 153.
[‡] See Stebbing: op. cit. p. 216.
[§] Mandla District Gazetteer A. Volume. p. 270.

Progress of Plough Cultivation

In the early stages of the reform Baigas did not accept the change happily. Since they were traditional axe-cultivators and Bewar represented a living myth in their life, they offered resistence in some places. In Mandla where Baigas lived in largest number, it was found quite impracticable, as well as hard and impolite, to force them to give up their *dhya* cultivation and take to the plough. In Balaghat the policy of weaning from axe met with vigorous opposition. Upto 1870 hardly three or four families could be persuaded to take to the plough. However, in 1871 residents of a Narotia Baiga village were won over with a reward of Rs. 200/- for killing a wild elephant. But on the whole progress was very slow in the entire district. By 1878 only about 40 families out of 441 in the District could be settled. The Deputy Commissioner wanted to speed up matters, but the Chief Commissioner advised him to proceed slowly in converting Baigas into plough cultivators. Simultaneously the administration decided to mix the Baiga with Gond who would teach them the new methods of cultivation. By September 1883 over 300 Baiga families were settled in 23 villages at an expenditure of Rs. 6,250/-. In Mandla the progress was equally slow. In 1879, 40 families were settled at a cost of Rs. 800/-. Thereafter the progress gained momentum every year and by 1885 the Mandla tehsil was largely free of Bewar.† But the officials had to face several kinds of difficulties. First they had to change Baiga's attitude towards plough cultivation. Here they were confronted with religious, social and psychological problems. Besides, Baigas lived in quite inaccessible parts of forests and it was a real problem to establish contact with them as they would not meet an outsider. Their poverty was a big limitation. It was not possible for them to manage seed and bullocks for plough cultivation. The change from axe to plough demanded not only material means, but also a radical revolution in their socio-economic set-up and the very way of life. It was intended to make a tribe pass from one stage of economic evolution to another. Naturally it involved a change in the technique of production, standard of living and social environment. In many places the tribesmen had to undergo untold sufferings due to unplanned and hasty decisions of officials. For example, in 1878 the Deputy Commissioner of Balaghat, in his zeal to speed up the progress of plough cultivation, went so far as to destroy standing crops on some existing Bewars. In many places anti-Bewar propaganda scared away the Baiga who ran away to areas like the Kawardha State and other Zamindaris where Bewar was permitted. Often this meant wholesale shifting of villages bringing financial loss and debt in its train.*

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*J. H. Moriss, Settlement Commissioner of Central Provinces quoted by Elwin in 'The Baiga'.

†Information based on District Gazetteers, Settlement Reports, and Elwin's books.

The Baiga Chak – An experiment in isolation.

Despite the determined official efforts and the facilities provided by Administration for settling down Bewar-cutting Baiga families, there was a strong minority left among the Baiga which did not yield to the change. For example, in Ramgarh tehsil of Mandla District nothing would induce Baigas to take to the plough. Col. Ward, the Settlement Officer, had anticipated this resistance and had therefore suggested as early as 1870 to confine the Bewar of such Baigas within a reserved area 'so as to allow them wood enough for their wants, but in situations where, owing to their previous devastations or the inaccessibility of locality, the timber is of little value'.† Besides, the forest officers also depended upon the hill tribes for the supply of labour and complete prohibition of Bewar would have interrupted this supply. The Government, therefore, decided to reserve a forest area for the Bewar-cutting Baigas in the Ramgarh tehsil.

A forest area of 23,920 acres (of the Ramgarh tehsil) in the Southern Wild Highlands of the Maikal range was demarcated for the purpose. The tract is now known as the Baiga Chak 'practically hemmed in on all sides by wild and uninhabitable hills. It is perfectly inaccessible and

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*A parallel is found among the Maria Gonds of Bastar where the moneylender and debt came into the Maria country with the abolition of *podu* or *bewar* cultivation. Refer Grigson's Report p, 217.

†Ward : Op. cit. p. 35.

The Author (at the extreme left) with a group of Baigas of Tanter village in the Baiga Chak.

The Author (with dark glasses) and his touring party.

There has been a considerable reduction in the area of Bewar also. During the period of ten years—1892 to 1901—an area of 3,354 acres was utilised for axe-cultivation by the Baiga and it was estimated that only 1000 acres had remained for use then; while in 1939 only 194 acres were under Bewar, an area that was changed every three years according to an official programme. This meant that about 70 acres a year were all that was required. Elwin estimated that since 1901 a vast area has recouped and in 1939 nearly 5500 acres were available for Bewar cultivation, while in 1891 only 1000 acres were estimated to be available for this purpose.

Certain facts of socio-economic importance may be noted about the present day conditions in the Chak. The tract is still very backward from the point of view of means of communication. Only a narrow fair-weather road passes through the northern border of the Chak connecting Kanhari with Chara. Its length is about 15 miles, *i.e.*, 27 yards. per head. The tract is, therefore, one of the most inaccessible parts of the State. There is no school in the Chak, except the Kanhari Forest School which has become almost a dormant institution with hardly a couple of pupils drawn from Kanhari village itself. During the course of our door to door investigation of each Baiga village in the Chak not a single literate Baiga was found in a total population of 658 persons of the tribe. Nor does any desire for education seem to have been created among the Baiga by the staff of the Forest Department, which supervises the Chak. Nothing has been done by the Medical and Public Health Department worth the name. The Baiga have to go to the Bajag or Mawai hospital, both of them are over 30 miles from the Chak. Postal service is practically unknown to the Chak people. An incident may be recalled when the Baiga could not distinguish between an envelope and postcard and showed his complete ignorance about the Post Office. Economically also the Chak population is not well off. In fact, it is at the lowest point. The per capita annual income of Rs. 37-13-0 is the lowest among all the zones of the Baiga land. Out of 91 families surveyed 61 families had their income below the average. Only 9 families had a slight excess of income over expenditure out of 91 families. The incidence of debt was also not less as out of 91 families 36 had borrowed during the year. Families whose budget was in deficit and did not borrow loan, either remained half starved or subsisted on roots and tubers. It is true the moneylender has not been able to establish his grip due to the inaccessibility of the tract, but the percentage of mutual borrowing among tribesmen is as high as 99—the Gond's share being 70 per cent. And it is to be remembered the methods of Gond moneylenders are not less exacting than that of the Mahajan. As regards drink, it is difficult to give any accurate data, for many factors vitiated such an enquiry.

However, a general statement may be hazarded on the strength of personal observation that the Baiga of the Chak are more prone to drink than other Baigas. The reason is obvious. The distillery at Dhurkatta is owned by a Baiga whose main interest is in encouraging drink among the members of his tribe. Dhurkatta being the social centre of the tribe attracts villagers from Ajgar, Silpuri and Tantar—all within a radius of 6 to 7 miles—almost a walking distance for a Baiga party out for drink. It is, therefore. not surprising to see many Baigas lying drunk throughout the day in and around the Baiga's liquor shop at Dhurkatta. The Baiga Chak thus presents a pathetic picture of physical isolation, ignorance. disease. drink and debt. A section of the tribe has been interned within a reformatory where, though official efforts have succeeded in compelling the Baiga to drop their axe, the former have utterly failed to provide a socio-economic substitute to the Bewar cult. After reserving the tract for the Bewar-cutting Baiga, the administration had harboured a feeling that all that was needed for the Baiga had been done and that with this the Baiga were contented. But it is not wholly true. A tour of the Chak disclosed certain facts about the situation. The Forest Department gives land for Bewar to the Chak people, but the area which is made available for each family is definitely inadequate. One and all complained that the Bewar area fell short of their requirements. Another difficulty is that they are required to do Bewar for more than three years on the same plot with the result that there is practically no wood available for burning in the fourth year. Since ash-manuring is insufficient in the subsequent years, the yield is extremely poor. Personal inspection of such plots in Dhurkatta and Silpuri and the unanimous opinion of the older Baiga confirmed this fact.

The Baiga are faced with another problem in this tract. The Forest Department has not made any provision to meet the requirements of the expanding Baiga population. It is customary among the Baiga to separate their son and establish his independent house soon after he is married. Under the existing arrangements the Forest Departments does not allot new plots to such families. Similar is the fate of their son-in-law who wants to settle down in the village of his wife. Existing arrangements of field cultivation do not solve their problem as the cultivable area in the tract is limited. Moreover, the hard barra land of the Chak does not respond to deeper ploughing or better seeds. Besides, the poor Baiga can hardly be expected to buy ploughs and bullocks at the very outset of their independent career. 'The field areas in the forest villages', remarked Grigson, 'are not large enough to allow of resting fallows. The only alternative appears to be the burning of forest growth and raising of crops in the ashes. At least

A group of Baigas of Baiga Chak.

A group of acculturised Baigas of Mukki village in Baihar Tehsil.

is, therefore, useless as a timber producing area.* After the creation of the Chak, Bewar was not permitted anywhere in the Mandla District and Baigas were warned that if they wished to practise Bewar, they should have moved into the Chak before the subsequent season set in. Only Baigas were to be allowed to settle in the Chak. The administration of the Chak was entrusted to the Forest Department and instructions were issued to its officers not to permit Bewar even in this tract except on the forest patches demarcated for this purpose. It was also to be made clear to Baigas that the administration did not approve this form of cultivation and therefore a tax of Re. 1/- per Bewar per annum was imposed. Forest officers were also asked to convert Baigas into regular cultivators. The administration made provision for grant of land within the Reserve on ten year lease to all the Baigas who agreed to adopt plough cultivation. In addition money advances for seed, cattle and plough were also granted under the supervision of the Forest Department. It was the declared policy of the Government to wean Baigas from the axe as much as possible, either by providing means for plough cultivation or employment under the Forest Department.

In the initial years of the establishment of the Chak, there was some confusion with regard to its management since it was not clearly mentioned in the Chief Commissioner's letter whether the Forest Department or the Deputy Commissioner was really responsible for weaning the Baiga from axe cultivation. Consequently nothing was done for three years in this direction excepting prohibition of Bewar. No substantial help was forthcoming for Baigas. The Chak, therefore, did not attract Bewar-cutting Baigas from outside, instead many Baiga families of the Chak migrated into the neighbouring Indian States where Bewar was still permitted. Inside the Chak, Baigas numbering 1551 agreed to do plough cultivation provided some help were given to them. But as stated above due to administrative inefficiency such help was not made available. The condition of Baigas within the Chak was, therefore, not happy. In the words of the Ranger, then in charge of the Chak 'They could not be allowed to make new Bewars nor have they been supplied with other means of support. So death is staring these poor helpless people in their faces as it were, and these innocent loya creatures are at the mercy of district authorities.' † Elwin who met some old Baigas gives a graphic description of the situation. 'Suddenly deprived of their ancestral means of livelihood, threatened with expulsion from the forests they had known from childhood, prevented even from growing root crops for fear this should divert their attention from the plough, forced to adopt a mode of cultivation forbidden by means of purchasing ploughs and cattle, these Baiga endured some years of utter poverty and destitution.'* In certain villages situation had become so bad that Baigas disobeyed the Government law and reverted back to Bewar cultivation. As a result they were provided with bullocks at Government expenses in 1893.† Ultimately the management of the Chak was transferred to the Forest Department and vigorous efforts were made to settle down Baigas to regular plough cultivation in forest villages. A new policy of settling Gonds in Baiga villages was adopted to teach plough cultivation to the latter. The management of the Chak was further tightened and a Forester was appointed to see that Baigas confined their axe-cultivation within the delimited boundaries. However, the leaders of Baiga opinion could not be brought round. There was a tussle between Baigas and the Government officials for over five years. It reacted adversely upon the number of Baigas living in the Chak. In 1891 the population of the Chak was 1551 ; in 1901 it further declined to 700, in 1903 there was further reduction of 100. Rajnisarai, a wholly Baiga village, was completely deserted and Baigas fled away into the neighbouring Indian States where they could cut Bewar without restriction. For over thirtyfive years—1903 to 1939—the Baiga population of the Chak remained almost stationary.

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* The Chak was established by a letter (No. 2860/221 of the 13th May 1890) from Mr. L.K. Lawries, Officiating Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, to the Commissioner of the Jabalpur Division

† Ranger Mohal Lal's letter to D.F.O. Mandla quoted in Elwin's book.

The population of the Chak has not remained purely Baiga in its composition. The administration encouraged other tribes to settle down in the Chak in order to teach plough cultivation to the Baiga. Today there are Dhabas, Ahirs, Agarias, Pankas, Gonds and others in the Chak. The following table shows the composition of population in the Baiga Chak :—

TABLE SHOWING COMPOSITION OF POPULATION IN BAIGA CHAK

	Total	Percentage of total population
Baigas	658	69
Other than Baigas	303	31

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*Elwin : Op. Cit. p. 118.

†Mandla District Gazetteer, p. 74.

The most common argument advanced against Bewar is that it leads to the destruction of forest wealth of the country on a very wide scale. After the first land settlement in the Baigaland, Forsyth wrote, 'The *dhya* clearings can be easily distinguished from tree jungle ; and you will see that for one acre left of the latter, thousands have been levelled by the axe. In fact, I can say, from an experience reaching over every teak tract in these hills that, excepting a few preserved by private proprietors, no teak forest ever escaped this treatment, unless so situated in ravines or on precipitous hill-sides as to make unprofitable to make *dhya* clearings on its site'.* About the Baiga in particular, he remarked that 'he is the most terrible enemy to the forests we have anywhere in these hills. Thousands of square miles of Sal Forest have been clean destroyed by them in progress of their *dhya* cultivation'†. J.W. Best, an ex-I.F.S., pleaded strongly for stopping bewar—'if the awful destruction of the forests by fire was to be checked then the *bewar* had to be stopped".‡ Another authority on forest conservancy, E. P. Stebbing, condemned shifting cultivation vehemently. "The forests of this Central Region had for centuries been devastated by the cutting and burning of the best timber to form ashes to manure their wretched fields of half wild grain".§ There is a long galaxy of officials and forestry-enthusiasts who have lamented the ruin of fine timber by the axe of the aborigine.

Others apprehend that uncontrolled felling of trees will not only exhaust the forest wealth of the Region, but also produce adverse effects on rainfall, the flow of rivers and fertility of the soil. It is feared shifting cultivation will reduce rainfall in the State and thus cause misery and suffering for the entire population. Trees on the river banks regulate and control the flow of rivers. If they are felled, rivers and streams will change their course and the neighbouring areas may be threatened with flood. Again, deforestation will help erosion of soil—a menace which must be guarded against in advance.

The system has been criticised even from the point of view of the axe-cultivator. It is often pointed out that with such crude methods the yield is low and precarious.** Since the soil on solpes or hill tops is of a very poor quality and ploughing is usually not done under the shifting cultivation, only a poor harvest is possible on such tracts. Moreover ashes, and sometimes even seeds are washed down the hills by heavy rains. After one or two burnings plants and shrubs do not revegetate and signs of exhaustion appear soon. The yield is thus not only low but also precarious. The holding off of rains for a few weeks after the seed was sown, or when the ear was forming, meant the ruin of the crop, and then the owner was usually compelled to subsist entirely on wild fruits, roots and tubers.*

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*Forsyth : Op. cit. Pp. 81-83 (new ed.)

† Forsyth : Ibid p. 364 (old ed.)

‡ J.W. Best : 'Forest Life in India'. p. 123

§ E. P. Stebbing : 'The Forests of India', Vol. I, p. 398.

** See G. S. Ghurye : "Aborigines— So Called' and Their Future." p. 136.

Shifting cultivation, it is alleged, makes man lazy, nomadic and averse to cultural progress. The labour of their peculiar system of cultivation, though severe, is of a fitful character, a few weeks of great toil being succeeded by an interval of idleness, broken only by aimless wanderings in the jungle of hunting expeditions. Periods of rude plenty, when the rains have been propitious to the crops, the hunt successful and the crop of Mahua abundant, have been succeeded by times of scarcity or even of want. This naturally led, it is further interpreted, to no thought of thrift; the necessity of periodically shifting their clearings and village sites created a want of local attachment and unsteadiness of occupation and temperament. As a natural consequence of this method of cultivation, the people led a wandering nomadic life. The huts were of the most temporary character made in crudest form. Shifting of such a settlement entailed but a day or two when the change of *dhya* sites made a move a necessity. Some administrators have condemned Bewar as an obstacle to the aboriginals' social progress. In fact, the system was forbidden by Richard Temple, first Chief Commissioner, 'to civilise these people and make them useful members of the commonwealth.' Mr. J.H. Morris Settlement Commissioner of Central Provinces was of the view that so long as these people raised Kodou Kutki on Bewar system, they could never improve, they could never rise in the human scale. It is argued further that this system of cultivation is not in keeping with the modern economic order, for 'it is not a system which anyone would adopt if he intended the product of his land to compete in the markets of the world.'†

The vehement criticism of Bewar has not remained unanswered. Administrators, forest and agriculture experts and anthropologists have offered a stubborn defence of the system. 'Shifting cultivation, with all its drawbacks and inefficiency, was the only system under which races (backward by modern standards) could safely cultivate the tropical forest, and nomadism the only system under which the grassland could be safely pastured.'† There is no doubt that it involves felling and the Baiga is not being taught how otherwise to raise crops, either by the Forest, or, much less, by the Agriculture Department.'* Jhilan village (which is now outside the Chak, but remained within it for a long time and bears many similarities to the Chak villages) deserves special attention. Some 25 years back Baigas of this village migrated to Dhaba village at a few miles distance. But when they returned to their original village after 16 or 17 years, they were not allowed to cut any Bewar. Small strips of valley land were allotted to them on the bank of the rocky Burhner. The soil is of the worst barra type and does not produce good yield. The Baiga were, no doubt, allotted some Kandabari† but their complaint is that the Forest Department insists that they should utilise these plots for ten years, while the plots are of such poor quality that quite a large number of Baigas have already abandoned them. Thus the Jhilan villagers are neither allowed to cut Bewar nor have they been settled at some place suitable for plough cultivation. Kandabaris have already ceased to give them any yield worth their labour. It is, therefore, no surprise that out of a total debt of Rs. 214-8-0 and 86 mds. 25 seers of grain for the whole Chak, the Jhilon village alone shares Rs. 132/- and 3 mds. 10 seers of grain. Since a road connects it with Bajag and Dindori, grain dealers and moneylenders have started visiting the village often.

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* See Stebbing : Op. cit. p. 400 and Forsyth : Op. cit. 81-83

† Jacks and Whyte : 'The Rape of the Earth', p. 105 and refer Report of the Partially Excluded Areas Enquiry Committee (Orissa), 1940 p. 23

Controversy regarding Bewar System

Shifting cultivation—known as Bewar—was prohibited by law in this State as far back as 1867. Since then official efforts and public opinion have tried to wean the aborigine from the axe. Tribals registered protests, made representations and offered resistance against anti-Bewar policy. The administration met it by persuason, provision of facilities and legal force. Legally it is now an established fact that Bewar is not permitted anywhere in the State except the Baiga Chak and some areas of the recently merged Chattisgarh States and Zamindaris where Settlement is still in a fluid state. Officially the issue has been settled, a definite policy is there and not much remains to be done in this direction, at least in the Baiga land. But as the facts discussed hereinafter will show, this was an *ex-parte* decision. The aboriginals have certainly yielded to law; but all through they have been demanding their right of 'freedom of the forest'‡ and even now the urge for Bewar is still there. 'Strictly speaking, a Baiga cannot without offence lacerate the breast of Mother Earth with the plough......in his heart of hearts, the Baiga, has still a contempt for regular cultivation', recorded the

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*Grigson : Notes on Aboriginal Problem in Mandla District ; p. 24.

†Plots for raising tubers and roots.

‡Refer—Ward : Mandla Settlement Report, p. 35. Bloomfield : Notes on Baigas.

Mandla Gazetteer fortyfive years after the prohibition of Bewar by law. About twentyfive years after this, Elwin toured the Baiga land extensively and found the same sentiment for Bewar among the Baiga. 'In Pandaria and Kawardha, in the wilder parts of Baihar, in parts of Bilaspur and Rewa, you will find the strongest religious and mythological beliefs about the danger of lacerating the breasts of Mother Earth and the evils of plough cultivation.* It is their own special possession, it makes them different from all others; it is their right and duty, laid on them from the beginning of the world'.† Ten years later W. V. Grigson, Aboriginal Tribes Enquiry Officer, completed an extensive enquiry of aboriginal problem in the whole State and found that for Baigas additional Bewar could be given in forest villages outside the Chak as well as inside it, perhaps on the scale of one acre per man. He suggested that regulated Bewar, never for more than two consecutive years on one plot, in this limited Baiga country, may be a sounder form of agriculture than an attempt to compel the Baiga to raise crops on the wretched inadequate Barra fields allotted to them in the Chak.‡ A decade after Grigson's Enquiry, Shri Bapat, Secretary, Banvasi Sewa Mandal wrote, 'The Baiga does not ordinarily like to come down from hills. He is interested in Bewar cultivation in the slopes of the hills or on the hill tops.'§ In Rewa the Baiga is still the real Bewar-cutter. He does not use the plough for cultivation and resorts to cutting of trees in the jungles, burning them to ashes and sowing seeds in them. A very few of them have learnt the first lesson of agriculture and have taken to ploughing.** During the course of our tour of Baiga villages of the Mandla, Bilaspur and Balaghat Districts, where the largest number of the Baiga is concentrated, it was discovered that although the practice had been stopped and its myth was slowly forgotten, a burning desire for Bewar still lingers in Baiga's heart. It is, therefore, wrong to presume that matter has been finally decided. The Baiga have dropped the axe not because they have realised the futility of axe-cultivation; but mainly due to fear of the sharper axe of the law. The change has not fit in the natural setting cf the Baiga. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the pros and cons of the Bewar system.

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*Elwin quoted by Grigson in his 'Notes on Aboriginals of Mandla District, p. 22.

†Elwin : Op. cit. p 131.

‡Grigson: The Aboriginal Problem in C. P. & Berar p. 344-45, and Notes on Aboriginals of Mandla District p. 23.

§Shri N. V. Bapat's article on Baigas in 'Tribes of India' ed. by Shri A. V. Thakkar Pp. 42-43.

**Shri Avadh Behari Lal's article on Rewa Baigas Ibid Pp. 234-237.

burning of trees, but the crux of the question is : what type of forest trees have been felled and whether such felling has caused permanent harm to vegetation ? It is significant to note 'that in most of this area (Bastar State) the forests have been too remote and inaccessible ever to be exploited and that, even though some fine timber has been sacrificed, much that has gone was hopelessly mature.'* In the absence of means of communication and general development of the tract, much of the vegetation goes waste nor is there any nearby market for minor products of the forest. Quite big tracts are inaccessible even to this day. For example, the northern portion of the Pandaria Zamindari and the Mungeli tehsil in the Bilaspur District, the Southern Upland of the Mandla District and the Northern portion of the Baihar tehsil in the Balaghat District, have not been opened up as yet. It is, therefore, not a commercial proposition to exploit the forest resources of these tracts. Bampfylde Fuller, Commissioner for Settlement and Agriculture (1893-1901) had suggested that the timber cut was not of great value and was situated in such remote and difficult localities that it would never pay to transport it.† The Baiga do not range through forests clearing patches for cultivation at random ; given adequate freedom to choose their plots they have more or less a definite programme of rotation, and the clearings after two or three year's cultivation may get ten to twelve year's rest, at the end of which they have revegetation. "There is much misconception", the Mandla Gazetteer recorded, "as to the amount of permanent damage done to the forests by the axe cultivation of the Baiga ; which has been blamed for the denudation of the sources of the upper Nerbudda and her tributaries. Mr. Bell discussed (Settlement Officer in Mandla Distt. from 1904 to 1910) this matter at length with many Baigas, and the allegation is not in accordance with either their assertions or his own observation. They claim that the jungle only grows the thicker and stronger after the abandonment of a Bewar, and they have shown not one, but fifty abandoned Bewars where the Sal reproduction was strong and luxuriant enough even to impede progress."‡ The population has been so sparse that natural regeneration has kept pace with the aboriginal's periodical fellings and little harm has resulted to either forest or soil. Dr. Christoph Von Furer Haimendorf making a close study of *podu* cultivation of the Reddis in Hyderabad wrote, "Experience has been the same in many parts of the world where small populations of shifting cultivators were left in possession of large forest areas ; the danger of deforestation is prone to arise only with the growth of progressive populations in the adjacent open country, which in expanding eat into the forest tracts and narrow the shifting cultivator's habitat.'* 'From land records officials', wrote Grigson, Tribal Enquiry Officer, 'I gathered that there is so much forest, so sparse a population, such a poor demand for major forest produce and such a complete absence of communications, and consequently so much land available for Bewar (in Bithli-Saletakri area), that no hill slope gets cut more than once in 14 or 15 years......I believe that Bewar could for all time be permitted here to Baigas, without any harm to the forest or rainfall or the soil of adjacent plains'.†

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* Grigson : 'Maria Gonds of Bastar', p. 128.

† Elwin : Op. cit. p. 128.

‡ Mandla District Gazetteer. p. 73.

The experience of the Maria Gonds in the Bastar State also confirms the same thing.‡ Messrs. Jacks and Whyte who completed a world survey of soil erosion analyse the problem in relation to population. "Native custom was to clear small forest patches for one or two years only and then move on while there was still sufficient fertility left to enable the forest to 'regenerate' itself. When the period of shifting cultivation is prolonged, owing to the pressure of increasing populations for example, fertility soon falls to a level below which natural regeneration will not occur...it must be admitted that no agricultural system except shifting cultivation has yet been devised that will ensure lasting stability and fertility to tropical forest soils under human management."§ Example of the Rengma Nagas shows that all suitable land in their country was taken up generations ago, and now lies fallow under secondary jungle for the six to twelve years rotation on which each block is cut.¶ The Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture opined, "We see no objection to the controlled system of shifting cultivation (as in Bengal) under which the necessary labour for replanting clear felled forest is obtained by allowing a certain fraction of the forest area to be placed in rotation under temporary cultivation".**

Experts are not unanimous about the eroding effects of shifting cultivation on the structure of the soil. The litter on the forest floor, it is pointed out, increases the absorptive powers of the soil, with the result that the high proportion of the rainfall is transferred to the ground-water table : the litter itself absorbs many times its volume of water. The peaks of run off are thus reduced in height of floods. No

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* **Christoph Von Furer Haimendorf : 'The Reddis of Bison Hills', p. 307.**

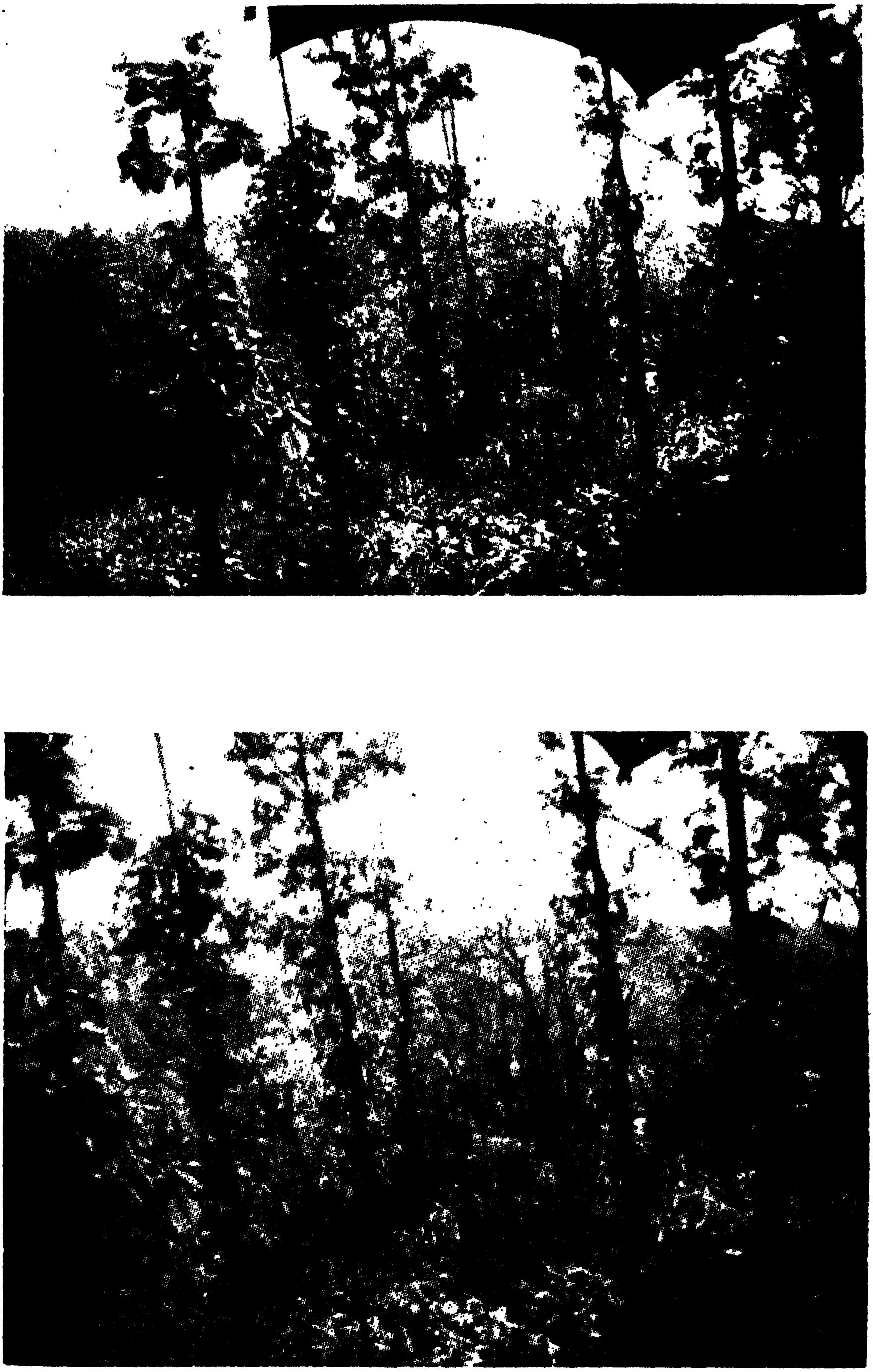
† **Grigson : 'The Aboriginal Problem in the Balaghat District', Pp. 32-33.**

‡ **Grigson ; 'The Maria Gonds of Bastar', p. 128.**

§ **Jacks and Whyte : Op. Cit. p. 103.**

¶ **Report of the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture, (Main Report), p. 268.**

** **J.P. Mills : 'The Rengma Nagas', p. 76.**



Regrowth of forest on a Bewar plot after three years.

doubt when the forest canopy is removed, the layer of litter on soil will also disappear resulting into increased frequency and severity of floods. This shows that the restriction of shifting cultivation to comparatively small and permanently demarcated areas near village is a double edged sword. For it compels the shifting cultivator to shorten the cycle of rotation and repeat cultivation on the same patch which has not fully recuperated, thereby further reduce the chance of its revegetation. The Chief Conservator of Forests, Central Provinces, while giving evidence before the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture clarified the effects of deforestation on soil, in the Provinces. 'So far it cannot be said that forests in Central Provinces have deteriorated to such an extent as to lead to soil erosion of a serious nature...I do not consider that floods that have occurred in the Central Provinces have been due to deterioration of forests. They have been due to unprecedented falls of rain against which no precautions were possible. Soil erosion is not a calamity in the Central Provinces.'* That soil structure is intact despite centuries old shifting cultivation in the Provinces is an ample testimony to the fact that Bewar had no adverse effects on soil structure, soil fertility and the floods. In the Bastar State too few signs of erosion are descernible and there are no signs of any reduction in the heavy rainfall.†

The yield on Bewar patches is definitely lower than on ploughed and manured fields. But it may be remembered that crop production is not an absolute factor. It depends upon the fertility of the soil, investment of the number of units of factors of production, the traditional technique of cultivation and climatic factors. Viewed, then, from this angle Bewar plots are quite suitable for the production of Baiga's staple foodgrains, namely Kodon and Kutki and other pulses. In fact many Baigas asserted that these grains sprout better on ash covered slopes and hill tops than in the level fields. Forsyth, strongest critic of the system, admitted that such was the fertilising power of the ashes that the crop was generally a very productive one, though the individual grains were far smaller than the same species as cultivated in the plains.‡ It is was noticed in the Baiga land that the *barra* land below in the valleys was definitely poorer than the bewar plots. Soil of the *barra* fields appears to have exhausted, and bears crop only after long fallow. Since this does not bear continuous cropping, the practice is to crop the land for three continuous years after which the soil is exhausted and is left fallow for five to seven years. The average yield on a Bewar plot is thus not so bad as is generally presumed keeping in view the soil conditions of these areas. Like ordinary agriculture depending on rainfall as is the general case in India, Bewar crops, are precarious. Successful sprouting and the formation of corn ears depends on adequate and timely rains. Some shifting cultivators of the Echli tract of Chanda district claimed that if Jalapod (axe-cultivation) were allowed on a reasonable scale they would always be able to produce enough corn even in years of deficient or irregular rainfall.* Since Bewar cultivation is wholly dependent on rainfall, its precariousness cannot be eliminated without substituting plough cultivation in its place. This will demand a wholesale change in the entire economic set up of the primitive men. Till such a change occurs, which is bound to take a long time, Baiga's preference for the precarious crops of the Bewar, over poor crops of the barra land is understandable.

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*D.O. Witt's (Chief Conservator of Forests) evidence before the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture. Report Vol. VI (C.P, & Berar) p. 278.

†Grigson : 'Maria Gonds of Bastar' p. 128.

‡Forsyth : op. cit. p. 82.

Shifting cultivation is not so easy or lethargic as is presumed by its critics. The aborigine has to walk on an average 7 to 8 miles per day to work on his Bewar plot. He has to climb hillocks, pass through valleys and at times wade through the streams. Then it is an arduous task to clear a forest patch covered with heavy timber and impenetrable undergrowth. The process becomes still more taxing if the patch is on the slope or on some creek. Big logs after felling are not left out indiscriminately. In most of the cases Baiga has to arrange them in such a manner that an even layer of ashes is obtained after burning. The firing of heavy trunks is not an easy job, particularly under the scortching heat of the sun. His toil does not end only here. He must fence his plot with logs, split bamboos and shrubs. Traps and snares have to be laid for wild animals. Until seeds sprout, he relaxes for a week or so, but thereafter resumes his active work again to watch his crops in the day as well as night. A night spent on a Bewar plot will convince anyone that it requires super-human courage to remain in these lonely, dark and dangerous places infested with tigers and panthers. And all this a Baiga faces with his bow and arrow. The family also shares the arduous work. The wife has to bring meals for her husband from such a long distance. Along with her children she participates in clearing the jungle, in sowing, reaping, winnowing etc. At times she also remains on the Bewar during nights. It is, therefore, not correct to call the Bewar as a lazy system of cultivation. No doubt the Baiga get intervals which have been characterised by Forsyth as 'aimless wanderings'. But in fact during these breaks the whole Baiga family is actively engaged in some or the other work—gathering of roots and fruits, fishing, hunting, honey-collection, selection of Bewar plot for the next turn etc. etc.

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* See J.D. Karewala's note to Grigson quoted in the latter's Report. p. 185.

Is shifting cultivation an obstacle to the social progress of the tribesmen? 'We must remember', emphasises Elwin, 'that shifting cultivation is regarded in other parts of the world as the mark of a comparatively advanced stage of civilisation'. Many tribes of the world have no form of cultivation at all and live by hunting and gathering food.* The mound culture of America and the ditch-culture of ancient Peru and the hoe-tillage of America and the South Seas are all more primitive than Bewar. A basic fact may, however, be emphasised that 'the cultivation of food plants does not stand alone in the culture of a tribe but is connected with many other culture traits. The system of cultivation is influenced by a number of factors —stage of economic evolution, geographical conditions, technological advancement and social progress in general. Often the system of agriculture is the result and not the cause of social progress. Development of means of transport and irrigation have been found to have changed the character of agriculture in many parts of the world. Therefore, it is necessary to first change the socio-economic environment of the axe-cultivator instead of changing the system of cultivation only.

The Bewar system is peculiarly suited to the requirements and aspirations of the Baiga. If enough forest land is permitted for Bewar the Baiga say that they can manage for their food quite well and supplement it with fruits and roots from the forest. In fact the Baiga are socially ethnocentric; they want to live their own way—arduous, courageous and typically forest life. They have, in fact, no aspirations to go out of their own forest abodes to contact the civilised world. The Baiga do not want to produce for the market. Hence their insistance on Bewar—a vital part of self-sufficient economy.

Advantages of Bewar claimed by Baigas

Being illiterate and ignorant a Baiga cannot explain his attitude towards Bewar in a cogent and scientific manner. Shy and simple he acquiesces easily to circumstances. Traditionally he is not in the habit of arguing or protesting against the law of the land.

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*The Semang and Sakai of Malayan Forests, the Bushmen of Africa, the Blackfoot of North American plains, Nootka of British Columbia, the Yukhagir and the Eskimo of Arctic regions, See 'Daryll Forde's 'Habitat, Economy and Society' Chapter on 'Food Gatherers'.

†Encyclopædia of Social Sciences Vol. 1-2, p. 573.

It is, therefore, no surprise that Baigas never gave an organised expression to their opposition to Government's anti-Bewar laws. However, during the course of intimate talks Baigas claimed certain definite advantages of Bewar-cutting. They explained these in one or two brief but remarkably precise and convincing sentences. One has to collect these small sentences (almost like proverbs) and view the whole matter from Baiga's angle.

'We are forest-dwellers, for us Bewar is what plough cultivation is for the Kisan'. The system fits in their forest life remarkably. It may be remembered Baigas are not regular cultivators. Since times immemorial they have been food gatherers and partly shifting cultivators. They had so harmonised their cultivation with forest activities that one supplements the other. Both the vocations—collection of forest produce and shifting cultivation - are interlinked. Without Bewar plots a Baiga cannot raise his staple food crop Kutki, and without hunting, food gathering and fishing he cannot make his diet wholesome. Bewar is not a continuous process like plough cultivation. It permits certain periods of interval during which Baiga and his whole family can collect fruits, roots, tubers, leaves, fibres, resin, honey etc. which satisfy his different wants. This enables him Baiga to make up the nutritional deficiency in his food. The arrangement has one more significant implication. Through it the Baiga secure diversification of their employment. 'We Baigas do not sit idle, we work throughout the year either on the Bewar or in the forest'. Thus the simple Baiga has solved one of the most complex problems of rural India, namely, underemployment. Bewar and forest work keep busy not only the male adults, but also provide enough work to women and children. Thus Bewar and forest work are the two sectors of the Baiga economy securing diversification and the conditions of full employment.

Bewar-cutting is the only means of livelihood, the Baiga point out, in their existing economic conditions. Plough cultivation is not within the means of an average Baiga. Comparatively it requires more investment of capital in the form of plough, bullocks, seeds and manures—which the poor Baiga at present do not possess. The majority of the Baiga who now do plough cultivations possess the crudest type of plough which just scratches the soil, their bullocks look like little calves, and manuring of the fields is not known to them. Unless their resources are augmented, the Baiga argue, profitable plough cultivation will remain for them a distant dream; while Bewar cultivation is, they suggest, in full consonance with their economic capacity. It does not require any expenses to be incurred on ploughing, manuring or other elaborate agricultural operations. The quantity of seeds required per acre is also less than for plough farming. Ashes and natural vegetation provide adequate manure and before the powers of the soil show signs of exhaustion, Baigas move to another patch. Though labour cost is high in Bewar, the total cost of cultivation is lower than of plough cultivation. Where the amount of capital available for investment is low, entrepreneurs' preference for the labour-intensive methods is natural. Moreover, Bewar is in tune with the technological condition of the Baiga tribe. 'We cannot raise luxuriant crops like the Kisans—we are jungle cutters'—told many Baigas of mixed villages when reminded of the Gond's superiority in agricultural technique. Agricultural technique without mechanical aid is more a result of traditional skill than of scientific training. It can be gained very slowly particularly when the heritage is at divergence with the plough cultivation. This is why the Baiga find themselves at loss when they raise crops with plough. The Government had recognised this handicap of the tribe at the time of stopping Bewar. In 1895 many Gonds and other tribesmen were encouraged to settle down in the Baiga Chak for training the Baiga in plough cultivation. Since the Baiga were averse to it in the initial years and their resources did not permit them to have their own plough and bullocks, they are more backward than other tribes in plough agriculture. Hence their preference for Bewar, in which they are well versed. Soil conditions of the tract are another reason for this preference. The Baiga pointed out in many villages that the *Barra* lands were the poorest in their villages. They are usually found on *dadars* flat tops of the hills, so common in Mandla district and Mungeli and Kawardha tracts. The *barra* land is incapable of rabi or rice. In the Baiga Chak even pulses and coarse grains cannot be cultivated on any profitable scale. In these circumstances, Baigas point out, Bewar and Kanda Koosa (collection of roots and fruits) are the only means of livelihood in their country. Many Baigas, particularly the older ones, strongly asserted that it was wrong to presume that they were the worst enemy of forest. In every Bewar cutting village they refuted the charge that the forest once burnt did not regrow. They pointed out many forest patches of regrowth. Given enough forest-land, the Baiga argued, they will not use a plot for more than two years (in the Pandaria Zamindari where the forest growth is sparse, they use a plot only for one year) and will return to it not before 10 to 12 years when the plot has regained its vegetation. Some of them went to the extent of saying that the regrowth was thicker and faster on the ash covered lands. But this happens only when Bewar is done only for a year or two on a plot. Continuous burning exhausts the fertility of soil and mars future regrowth. Baigas tell their experience that given adequate area for bewar, they can raise crops for their requirements.

If the patch is virgin the production is definitely more than sufficient for an average Baiga family. Baigani Kutki (a favourite of the Baiga) can be best grown on bewar plots and gives a very good yield. Above all Baiga's faith in the Bewar cult is invincible. His social traditions and mythical belief find expression through such sentences 'Baiga earns his livelihood with the *tangiya*', 'Bhagwan ordained that Baiga should live on Bewar and forest produce.'

Conclusions

We are now in a position to draw certain conclusions and make some basic proposals to bring about an increase in the agricultural production of the Baiga land in general.

(i) There are certain forest tracts in the Baiga land, for example, Northern parts of Mungeli and Kawardha tehsils and Pandaria Zamindaries, and the upper region of Baihar tehsil joining with southern upland of Mandla—where poorest Barra soil predominates in the valley lands. Besides, these forests are not much of commercial value due to their inaccessibility and the high transport charges. In such areas Bewar cutting or *dhya* cultivation and collection of forest produce can alone support the hill tribesmen like the Baiga. A Bewar belt may, therefore, be demarcated in the tract in which the Baiga may have the freedom to cut forest on certain conditions discussed hereinafter.

(ii) The belt should cover sufficient area so as to permit the necessary cycle of rotation of Bewars. A restricted area like the Baiga Chak has proved that under such restricted arrangements there is a little opportunity for leaving the Bewar plot fallow for long. The real danger from shifting cultivation, as experience of other countries shows, arises when the scortched plots are used for more than two years and the plots are not left fallow for recouperation. 'This native custom in its original form was not dangerous, but with increasing settlement, and more frequent return to the same plot, the soil is being not given to become revegetated and thus to regain its fertility'*. 'Native custom was to clear and cultivate small forest patches for one or two years only and then move on while there was still sufficient fertility left to enable the forest to regenerate itself. When the period of shifting cultivation is prolonged, fertility soon falls to a level below which natural regeneration will not occur.'† Conditions in the Reddi country substantiate this view. Where *podu* has been unrestricted it has had little destructive effect on the forest growth, while the setting apart of too small an area for *podu* is leading to over-cultivation and irreparable deterioration of soil in the assigned area.* In Bastar also experience of bewar-cutters confirms that enough lands should be given to ensure the necessary cycle of rotation of plots.† A sufficient area for bewar cultivation should be allotted to each village which may permit the customary cycle of rotation *i.e.* 10 to 12 years between each period of cultivation.

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* Jacks and Whyte : 'The Rape of the Earth', p. 62.

† Ibid. p. 103

(*iii*) On no account should a Baiga be required to use the same Bewar either more or less than two years at a time. This will enable the forests to recuperate much more quickly and also give good yield. The exact details of the area required is a matter to be worked out by the agricultural experts. Examples of foreign countries may be cited. Conditions in Africa suggest that the amount of land required need not be very great, provided that a regular system is followed. In the southern Provinces of Nigeria each family of 3.6 persons cultivates two acres annually, and the land rests for seven years against one of the cultivation, hence each family requires sixteen acres. In the Northern Provinces each needs twenty four acres. For the Reddis in hilly tract of the Godavari gorge, Haimendorf proposed that 8 times the area under *podu* should be for *podu* by rotation.‡ Elwin thinks that the Baiga ratio of cultivation to fallowing would be 10 : 2 or even 10 : 3, which would be more economical.§

(*iv*) The Baiga have developed an attitude of wrecklessness in felling trees for their Bewars, probably due to their resentment against Government's anti-Bewar policy. and partly due to the traditional habit favoured by availability of unlimited forest areas. Efforts should be made by persuasion and propaganda to remove this 'attitude of wrecklessness'. As far as possible Bewar cutting should not be permitted in predominantly Sal patches. Only mixed or bamboo forests should be felled for Bewar, They should not be cut on ridges enclosing the head waters of important streams. Then the Baiga should be encouraged to leave the stump unburnt so that offshoots may come out at the end of second year. Wherever the growth is dense bigger trees may be left out practically untouched.

(*v*) With the conferment of Bewar cutting rights upon the Baiga, they must also be made to realise their duties in regard to forest protection and development. It should be made incumbent upon them to maintain fire lines between their Bewars and forest zones. The protection of forests against fire in the Bewar belt should be the responsibility of the Baiga residing in that particular area. But the more important work, which should be made obligatory upon the Baiga, is to replant the Bewar plots (tangya method) impoverished by burning. The experiment has been quite successful in Nigeria, in the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone. The French have also made a commencement with the method. 'In principle, it merely consists in felling a piece of forest in more or less the fashion under which farming is practised in West Africa (Shifting Cultivation). The agriculturist who undertakes felling is granted by the Forest Department this piece of forest land rent free for a couple or more years to raise agricultural crops, on the condition that he plants out young forest trees, or sows the seed, in such a manner (usually in lines at a stipulated distance apart) and in such a year of the lease as may be laid down by the forest officer. Thus, when the land is vacated by the agriculturist, a young forest crop of trees remains in situ. This method of obtaining a new forest crop is applicable alike to high timber forests of valuable commercial species and to fuel plantations.'* The axe-cultivator should be asked to definitely indicate the areas to be farmed during the next ten years, with the order in which they would be farmed. On each plot so indicated a number of young forest trees of rapid growing indigenous or other species (easily selected for each locality) should be supplied by the Forest Department, and be planted by the owner of the plot after the manner prescribed by the Department. The cultivator should look after these plants during the period he occupies the area. When the latter moved on, the new young trees thus brought in would have definitely increased the density of the forest patch by the time it was again cut for Bewar. In this fashion a regrowth of Bewar patches could be brought about, at small cost, by the shifting cultivator himself with the help of the Forest Department, and with increasing success and resulting crop values, once the simple method is made popular among the Baiga. It would be necessary to establish forest nurseries in different parts of the Bewar belt and more forest staff will have to be employed to supervise and guide the Baiga. In the initial stages some difficulty may have to be overcome in persuading the Baiga to cooperate. But once the older Baiga are taken into confidence and their good services are utilised for the purpose, it will be easier to make the Baiga replant their Bewar than it was found to wean them from the axe.

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* **Christoph Von Furer Haimendorf : 'The Reddis of the Bison Hills', p. 308.**

† **Grigson : 'Maria Gonds of Bastar'; p.128.**
'Aboriginal Problem in C.P. & Berar', P. 344-345.

‡ **Haimendorf ; 'Tribal Hyderabad', p. 54.**

§ **Elwin op. cit. p. 520.**

(*vi*) In view of the expanding population of the State, development of means of communication and transport and increasing culture contact between the hill tribes and the 'civilised', it is neither practicable nor is it desirable to isolate the Baiga or make them subsist on shifting cultivation for all times to come. Already a majority of the Baiga has settled down to plough cultivation, though the manner and speed of the change has not been satisfactory. It is, therefore, necessary to rehabilitate the plough-cultivator Baiga so that he may come up to the average standard prevailing in the State. This will involve a complete reorganisation of agricultural economy of the tribal areas. The issue is connected with the rural economy of the State as a whole and has to be attacked on many fronts. However, the immediate needs of the aboriginal cultivator may be described in brief. At present the majority of the Baiga lives in areas of Barra Soils which are awefully poor. The field areas in the forest villages are not large enough to allow of resting fallows. Therefore, larger areas for regular field cultivation should be allotted to enable the Baiga to give their *barra* lands adequate resting fallows. Simultaneously either through the cooperative societies or the Forest Department they should be advanced money (preferably seeds and ploughs) for purchasing plough, bullocks and seeds. A small council of village elders may be constituted to help in the distribution of this help and to see that the money or the commodity advanced is put to its proper use. Artificial irrigation is at present practically unknown in the hill areas of the Baiga land. But there are certain valley tracts where rain-water can be conserved for irrigation purposes by constructing small *bunds* or closing the *nullahs*. The Baiga already do it on a smaller scale for fishing and drinking purposes. The practice has only to be harnessed for building small irrigation works—an essential requirement of regular plough cultivation. In short it will involve complete reorganisation of aboriginals' agriculture which is analysed in the subsequent chapter.

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* E.P. Stebbing : 'The Forests of West Africa and Sahara', p.49.

CHAPTER V

PLOUGH CULTIVATION

The Baiga agriculture entered a new phase in 1867 when Government declared the felling of forest for cultivation an offence under the law. The government fiat caused a sudden change in the agricultural practices of the tribesmen. As pointed out earlier, the change-over to plough cultivation created a number of difficulties for the Baiga tribe which lived on hill tops where land for plough farming was scarce. Irrigation facilities were neither needed nor created by the primitive. Adept as they were in burning the forest patches, the Baiga did not know any other type of manuring. Axe (tangiya) and hoe (khanta) were their main implements. They raised coarse millets, and that too for domestic consumption of a limited nature, for wild roots and fruits and spoils of game formed a considerable part of their diet. It is with this tradition that the tribe had to adopt plough cultivation under the pressure of the law. Consequently their present agricultural technique is not the outcome of natural evolution but a forced change without any preparation oı means commensurate with the dimensions of the change. It is, therefore, no surprise that Baiga today lack agricultural traditions and technique. In fact, they are new entıants in the field and therefore lag much behind the rural people in productive efficiency. The reasons of their agricultural backwardness are partly inherent in natural conditions and partly in the suddenness of the change. We shall note these reasons while describing the main features of Baiga's plough cultivation. However, it may be mentioned that Baiga's agricultural practices in their essentials are similar to those of the cultivators of the plains. The major point of difference lies in the undeveloped character of the Baiga technique. The following description, therefore, mainly attempts to bring out this difference before the reader.

Soils of Baiga Land

The Baiga land lies on both the sides of the Maikal range from Amarkantak in the East to Saletekri in the South West. This vast region has a variety of rocks, hill tops, deep river valleys and strips of even fertile land. As a result, every type of soil from the most fertile alluvial Kachhar to the poorest *barra* land is found in the region. Originally the Baiga moved from one forest to another. Finally they settled down mostly in inaccessible flat hill tops to carry on shifting cultivation secretly, and evade the law. Thus, almost every Baiga village commands *barra* land on the ridges, strips of plain sandy or clayey soil at the foot of the hill and Kachhar land on the banks of the nearby *nulah* or river stream.

The classification of the soils of the Baiga region, as contained in Settlement Reports, is based to a very large extent on the opinions of the cultivators who on account of their actual experience were considered 'to be more reliable authorities on this subject than a whole library of geological treatises'.* For general classes of soils are popularly recognised in the region : Kanhar, Morand, Sihar and Barra.

Kanhar is a bluish-black 'black cotton' clay, of extreme depth and fertility, soft and sticky when wet, very hard and heavy when dry. It is retentive of moisture and contains but little sand, pebbles or limestone grit. It can do without the winter rains, but on the other hand suffers from excessive cloud or moisture. It is commonest in the Haweli and Pathar tracts of the Mandla District, plains of Mungeli in Bilaspur district and Dhansua, and Hutta groups of the Balaghat district. A Kanhar field will grow either wheat or rice, but is more naturally a wheat soil. It is somewhat liable to water-logging and rust. Since Baigas dwell on hill tops the percentage of Kanhar land to total cultivable land is apparently very small. Most of the Kanhar fields of the Haweli and Pathar area in the Mandla district are cultivated either by the Gonds or by Kurmis and Lodhis or Hindu cultivators. Due to the location of their villages, the Baiga are thus deprived of the best soil of the region—a fact which influences the crop yield of the Baiga cultivator.

Morand is black or brown soil, differing from Kanhar in being more friable when dry, less retentive of moisture, of a lighter colour and weight, and containing more sand, pebbles or lime-stone grit. Lime stone materially reduces its productivity. Yet it is suitable for all crops. Wheat and gram are usually sown in Morand soil, to lose nothing in fertility thereby. The majority of the Baiga is again not able to get this land for cultivation as most of such soil is found in the plains or long flat valleys. Wherever morand fields are cultivated by the Baiga, he is not able to take full advantage of them because the long distance from homestead prevents their adequate manuring and proper watch against wild animals. It is only with bullock-cart transport, irrigation, manuring and crop rotation that powers of this soil can be exploited at the optimum point. Unfortunately the Baiga lack all these, and therefore fail to make any good use of even small strips of morand fields found in the Baiga region.

Sihar is a light yellow soil, a mixture of clay and fine sand. It cracks little, if at all, when dry. It varies a good deal in quality according to its depth and richness. Though unfit for rabi or spring crops, given good rains it is rice soil par excellence. It is usually incapable of a second crop. Sihar is common only in the rice tracts of the Baiga region namely areas falling in Balaghat and Bilaspur districts. It is practically non-existent in the Baiga tract of the Dindori or north Mandla tehsils. Since Baigas do not irrigate their farms, Sihar fields wherever they occur in Baiga region are utilised for coarse millets.

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* **Mandla District Gazetteer (A Volume) p. 107.**

Barra—the poorest of all soils of the region, has fallen to the lot of the poorest section of the people. True barra is a red gravelly or murram soil, often extra-ordinarily stony or with rock underlying it within twelve or eighteen inches. Large expanses of good level red barra are usually found on *dadars* or flat tops of hills, so common in the eastern part of the Baiga region. Barra fields are incapable of rabi crops or rice. But given good rains it is the best soil for Kodon. Kutki and Til, and also for back gardens. Barra soil, as we shall see later on, is the basis of Baiga agriculture. It influences the size of farms, kind of crop, yield per acre and the general economic condition of the tribe. The poor soil yields poor crops which in their turn keep the tribesmen in perpetual poverty. Nearly 40 per cent of the cultivable land has to be left fallow every year as barra fields cannot stand continuous cropping.

The rich yellow flaky deposit lying along river banks below flood level is called Kachhar. It is very rare and is almost entirely devoted to garden crops, but fine crops of wheat are occasionally grown on it. Baigas generally do not live on river banks, and therefore do not raise crop on Kachhar. Since they cultivate Kodon and Kutki which grows best on the hill tops, they are not conversant with the technique of Kachhar cultivation.

To sum up the soil position, the Baiga live in such spots where the soil is of the poorest type. Even where fertile land is available in small patches they are not able to take advantage of it due to distance factor, lack of transport and other agricultural means. Moreover, their agricultural traditions act as a handicap in the utilisation of better type of soils or improving the fertility of poorer soils. Nomads as they were, the Baiga rely more on natural fertility of the soil than on human efforts for improving upon nature's gift. Therefore, any programme of agricultural improvement will have to take Baigas' attitude towards land fertility into consideration. For it exercises a tremendous effect upon the technique of cultivation and the size of farms in Baiga villages.

Size of Agricultural Holdings

As in the case of other agriculturists the size of holding has a tremendous importance for the Baiga cultivator. If the modern cultivator needs a bigger and more fertile farm for raising his standard of living, the aboriginal requires it for meeting his bare necessity of coarse grains.

In fact, the latter wants more land than the former, for he relies more on the natural powers of the soil, and has extremely limited means to augment the fertility of soil with artificial means. An analysis of the size of holdings in the Baiga region comprising the districts of Balaghat, Bilaspur and Mandla reveals certain interesting facts. Out of 576937, the total number of agricultural holdings in the Region, 142633 holdings (24.7 per cent of the total) are not more than one acre in size. 210609 holdings, that is, 36.8 per cent of the total, are between the size of 1 and 5 acres. The number of holdings ranging between 5 and 10 acres is 110364 (19.1 per cent of the total). The percentage of holdings ranging between 10 and 50 acres recedes down further to 17.8 recording 102983 number of holdings. The following table sums up the position of size of holding in the whole Baiga region :—

CLASSIFICATION OF AGRICULTURAL HOLDINGS OF BAIGA REGION ACCORDING TO SIZE*

Size	Total number of holdings	Percentage of the total number of holdings
Not exceeding 1 acre	1,42,633	24.7
Exceeding 1 acre but not exceeding 5 acres	2,10,609	36.8
" 5 acres " " " 10 "	1,10,364	19.1
" 10 " " " " 50 "	1,02,983	17.8
" 50 " " " " 150 "	9,779	1.6
" 150 acres	569	...
Total	5,76,937	

The above table does not reveal a happy position of the size of holdings in the Baiga region. Out of 5,76,937 total number of holdings 4,63,606 holdings do not exceed 10 acres in size e.g. 80 per cent of the holdings in the region are between the sizes of 1 and 10 acres. Further analysis proves the poignancy and urgency of the situation. 3,53,242 (over 60 per cent of the total) holdings are between 1 and 5 acres. Nearly one fourth of the total number of holdings are small patches of not even 1 acre.

*** District Census Handbooks (Balaghat, Bilaspur & Mandla), 1951.**

The conditions in aboriginal tracts do not seem any exception to the State wide chronic evil of multiplying number of small size holdings. A recent investigation conducted by the Revenue Department disclosed that small size holdings of 5 acres and 6 to 10 acres have increased by 34 per cent and 30 per cent respectively in the State. Holdings of 11 to 30 acres have fallen by 11.5 per cent, whereas the holdings of 31 acres and above have fallen by 27.5 per cent. Thus, during the last two decades small holdings under 10 acres have on an average increased by one third their number in 1930.*

Although no data are available for the Baiga region (as no survey was done before) to prove with any statistical accuracy that similar tendencies are in operation in the Region to the same extent, there are other collateral facts which lead us to the basic conclusion that even in aboriginal areas the number of small-size holdings is increasing. Briefly stated the reasons are : General increase in the population of the State and the consequent encroachment upon forest lands for cultivation; reservation of forests and the resulting shrinkage in agricultural land in forests; increasing pressure of cattle population on forest lands; more stringent rules regarding the utilisation of forest lands for cultivation by aboriginals and the alienation of land from the aboriginal to non-aboriginals. Though no data on the working of these forces are available, the high percentage (60) of small size holdings (below 5 acres) is a sure proof of the adverse resuls of these forces. The following table throws light on the conditions prevailing in different regions of the Baiga land.

Before analysing this table, it is necessary to describe the factors which influence the size of holding in the Baiga land. The type of soil occuring in the region is the most powerful factor in determining the size of the holding. The poorer the soil, the greater should be the size of holding necessary for raising a particular quantity of foodgrains. Most of the Baiga land is stony or barra soil quite unresponsive to manuring or irrigation. Therefore, the Baiga cultivator needs bigger farms than the ordinary cultivator of the plains, to meet his food requirements. Further, unlike the Hindu cultivator the Baiga have no agricultural traditions. As they were nomads, they are not in the habit of making permanent improvements in their farms. Nor are they yet well versed in the technique of intensive cultivation so necessary for the small size farms. Baiga's traditional love of roaming in the forest for foodgathering and hunting prevents him from concentrating on the year round agricultural operations. He prefers to broadcast seeds on wide

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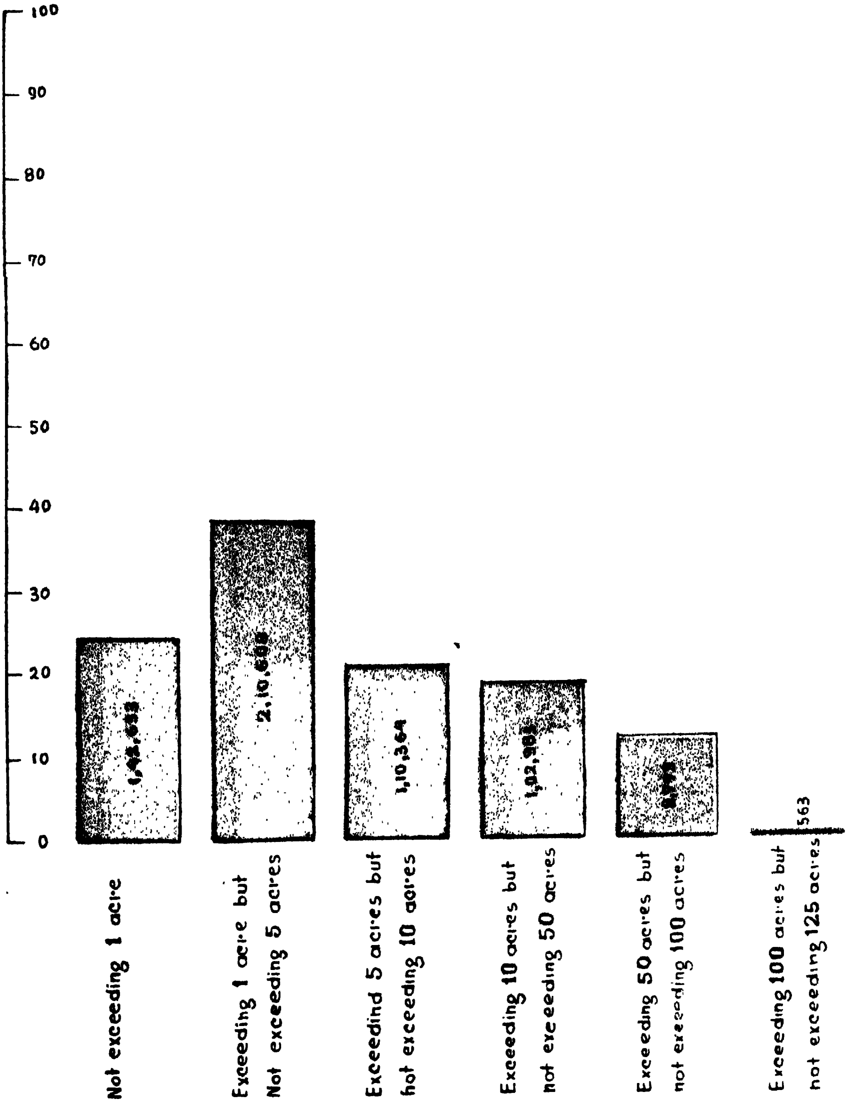
* Report of 'Agriculture Policy Committee', (M.P.), 1951, p.10.
District Census Reports (1951).

Classification of agricultural holdings of Baiga land according to size



Classification of Agricultural Holding of Baiga Land According to size
(showing regional variations)

District	Not exceeding one acre		Exceeding one acre but not exceeding 5 acres.		Exceeding 5 acres but not exceeding 10 acres.		Exceeding 10 acres but not exceeding 50 acres.		Exceeding 50 acres but not exceeding 150 acres.		Above 150 acres.		Total No. of holdings of all sizes in the District.
	Total No. of holdings.	% of total No. of holdings.	Total No. of holdings.	% of total No. of holdings.	Total No. of holdings.	% of total No. of holdings.	Total No. of holdings.	% of total No. of holdings.	Total No. of holdings.	% of total No. of holdings.	Total No. of holdings.	% of total No. of holdings.	
Balaghat	31.502	26.3	42,080	35.1	26,790	22.3	18,285	15.2	917	.76	70		1,19,644
Bilaspur	95,313	26.9	1,44,616	40.8	63,976	18.06	47,036	13.2	2,853	.805	408		3,54,232
Mandla	15,818	15.3	23.913	23.2	19,598	19.01	37,632	36.5	6,009	.06	91		1,03,031
Total Baiga Land	1,42,633	24.7	2,10,609	36.8	1,10,384	19.1	1,02,983	17.8	9,779	1.6	569		5,76,937

fields, and leave them at the mercy of nature, and roam in the forest for hunting. Unlike the cultivator of the plains he is not a wholetime cultivator; he tries to include forest adventures in his annual time-table. Besides, he is primarily a cultivator of coarse millets—his staple food—which give better returns through rotating cultivation than intensive or continuous cultivation on small fields. It is for these reasons that Baiga's economic holding has to be larger than that of an ordinary cultivator. In our opinion, an economic holding for the hilly aboriginal areas should be 15 acres, in area.* To take a more conservative estimate, holdings falling below 10 acres may be considered uneconomic.

But some adjustments will have to be made in the size of economic holdings according to the soil conditions obtained in different districts. The fields of the Baiga villages of Balaghat and Bilaspur districts are comparatively more fertile and better situated than those of the rugged Baiga tracts of Mandla district where two-third of the total Baiga population lives. Moreover, the Baiga of Balaghat and Bilaspur are more advanced in agricultural technique than their counterparts in Mandla. It can, therefore, be safely concluded that in the case of Balaghat and Bilaspur, holdings falling below 5 acres are uneconomic and those between 5 and 10 acres are on the marginal line. While in the case of Mandla where *barra* fields are common, holdings below 10 acres must be considered uneconomic. The following table sums up the situation obtained in different districts :—

District	Total No. of holdings	Uneconomic holdings		Holdings on the margin		Economic holdings	
		No. of holdings	percentage of the total	No. of holdings	percentage of the total	No. of holdings	percentage of the total
Balaghat	119,644	73,582	61.4	26,790	22.3	19,272	16.3
Bilaspur	354,232	2,39,929	67.7	63,976	18.06	50,327	14.24
Mandla	103,061	59,329	57.5	18,596	18.0	25,136	24.5

It is clear from the above table that Bilaspur has the highest percentage of uneconomic holdings namely 67.7 while Balaghat comes second with 61.4 per cent. and Mandla has 57.5 per cent of its holdings uneconomic. The rate of increase and density of population explain the

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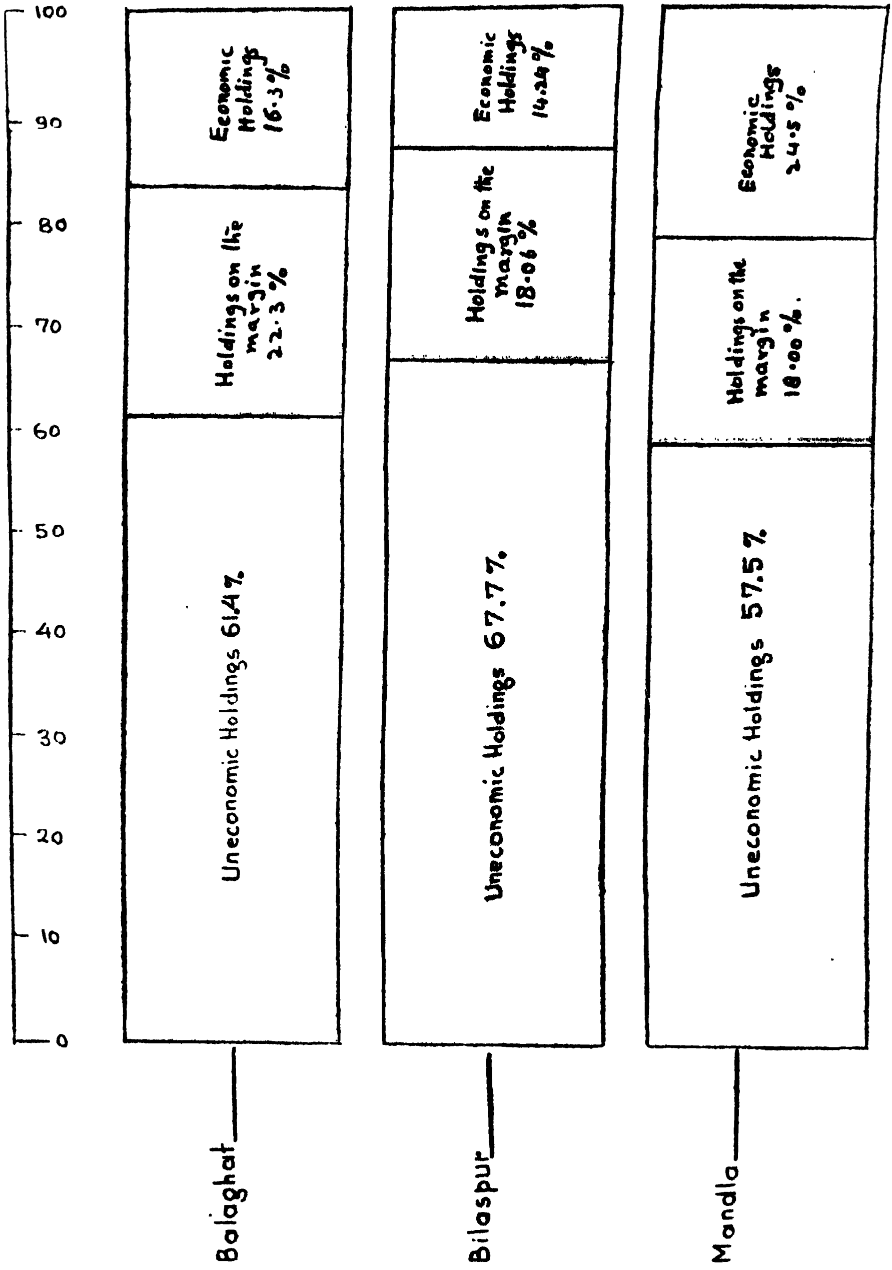
*See 'The Aboriginal Problem in C.P. & Berar,' (1944), p. 82.

POSITION OF AGRICULTURAL HOLDINGS.



reasons for varying conditions in different districts. A rough relationship between the percentage of uneconomic holdings and population pressure is shown in the table below :—

District	Percentage of Uneconomic holdings	Density of population per mile (rural)	Percentage variation in population 1941-51
Balaghat	61.4	186	6.94
Bilaspur	67.7	214	8.31
Mandla (Dindori tehsil where Baigas are concentrated)	57.5	91	3.95

The situation in Mandla is not so alarming as in Balaghat and Bilaspur. But the figures for Mandla should not lead us to complacency, for the population increase of the District as a whole has recorded percentage variation to the extent of 8.53 during 1941-51 and a further increase in population is bound to push its way into aboriginal areas. Moreover, soil in the Mandla tract is of the poorest quality which can neither be improved in fertility within reasonable time and cost nor can it bear the pressure of population. Therefore, further increase of population in this tract will raise the percentage of uneconomic holdings, the consequences of which for the Baiga will be more disastrous as they are educationally and politically more backward than their tribesmen in Bilaspur and Balaghat districts.

Technique of Cultivation

The size of holdings and the kind of soil and of crops have influenced Baiga's technique of cultivation to a considerable extent. The major part of cultivated area is a stony *Barra* land and the size of holdings is comparatively larger. Therefore in the Mandla district Baigas have evolved a peculiar system of cultivation aptly described as 'Rotating Cultivation'. Since *Barra* soil will not bear continuous cultivation the practice is to crop the land for three continuous years, the usual rotation being Jagni in the first year, which is supposed to increase the outturn of the Kodon and Kutki crops which follow in the second and third year, respectively. After three years, the soil is exhausted and is left fallow for 3 to 5 years. Thus about one-third of the poor land being cultivated in succession for three years at a time, and then left to recover. Consequently extensive fallowing is practised throughout the Baiga region particularly twigs and branches on the nursery and burn them. When the rain falls, this is ploughed into the ground, and the *datari* or harrow worked over the land to break up the clods. Manure is not always or even usually given to any part of the field besides the nursery. The site of the nursery has to be changed practically every year, otherwise, it is said, the soil is exhausted and becomes too loose. For parta about one *bhatia khandi* (109 seers) of seed will transplant into 2.55 acres of light soil. The seedlings in 20 or 25 days grow to a foot in height, when they are fit for transplanting. Meantime the remaining area is ploughed again and left for a week, the banks being repaired to make them hold water. The clods are broken and land surface is reduced to a smooth and creamy mud with plough and harrow. The process is known as *chikal machana*. The seedlings are uprooted from the nursery and stuck into the mud in bunches of about three or five, mostly by women. After a day or two seedlings stand upright except when rains are heavy. If things go well, the transplanting should be over in a month. The transplanting method is not common in the Baiga region except the Baihar tract where it is said to give a large outturn and again of superior quality and flavour and to be indispensable for the best kinds of rice. It is practised in a very few Baiga villages of Bilaspur and Mandla where irrigation facilities are very poor.

The second method known as *lehi* (by previous germination) is a modified form of transplantation and is adopted when monsoon rains are late. The rice seed is artificially germinated by being soaked for 2 to 3 days in a pot full of water and then covered over inside the house with a heap of straw to exclude light and produce warmth. When the field has been well saturated by the first rains and an inch or two of water is standing on it, soil is puddled into thin mud with plough. And then artificially germinated seeds are thrown boradcast into fields. Lehi method is, however, a risky process and unless heavy rain follows shortly after sowing, the crop is lost. Lehi sowing is only adopted in fields which cannot be sown promptly.

The third method known as *batar*, *bota* or *boar* or broadcasting is most popular among the Baiga. Broadcasting is done after the fields have had one ploughing. In the case of Khurra sowing seed is broadcasted over ground which has been prepared before the rains break, and in the case of batar sowing over ground which is ploughed immediately before sowing once or twice according to the amount of grass and weeds in the field. Whatever be state of the ground before the seed is scattered over it, the latter is ploughed in by a final ploughing. Broadcast cultivation is much cheaper than transplanting as there is no labour needed for the former that is not required for the latter; while latter takes more ploughing to start with, and there is also the very expensive transplanting. Whichever method of sowing is adopted, the rice plants, about four or five weeks after sowing time, when they have obtained a height of foot or so, are thinned by driving a plough through the field at right angles to the lines which have been made by the ploughings preliminary to sowing. This method of thinning is locally known as *biasi*.

Wheat cultivation

Wheat as a principal spring crop has more importance in Bilaspur and Mandla districts than in the district of Balaghat. It is sown from the end of October till early in December in land which when unembanked, has usually been ploughed three or four times before the final ploughing is done. The cultivator begins to plough his wheat land in the latter half of August when he has completed the thinning of his rice and Kodon. The final ploughing is done at the end of October or in November when the seed is sown. If a field is specially weedy it may be given as many as five preliminary ploughings. The seed is sown in lines by being dropped through a hollow bamboo, called *tora*, which is inserted in a hole drilled through the *nas* or wooden share of the plough. This bamboo stands upright between the oxen and the ploughman, and is surmounted by a bottomless wood cup, called *paila* which fits over the top of it. and into which second man who walks beside the plough drops the seed. The latter falls into the furrow behind the toe of the share, the heel of which passes over; and on the withdrawal of the heal of the share, as the plough passes on, the earth drops back over the seed. Wheat is very rarely irrigated and practically never manured or weeded by the Baiga. After sowing until it is harvested it receives no further attention beyond watching and occasionally, in fields on the thorough route of wild animals, fencing with thorns, to protect from cattle and wild animals. It requires some three or four breaks in the June, July, August and September rains, to allow of liberal ploughings, light showers in October to keep moist the seed-beds on the higher levels, one shower to settle the seed after sowing, about an inch of December rain, and, from then to reaping, clear dry weather without frost. A common form of agricultural improvement done by Baigas of Bilaspur side is the construction of embankments round wheat fields, which hold up water till sowing-time, when it is drained off. This arrangement retains moisture in the field necessary for germination and renders the ground much softer and prevents the growth of weeds. It reduces the number of fields and is the best safeguard against drought. The principal varieties grown are Galalia Kathia, Bansi (which belong to the sub-species "dunum" and are macaroni wheats) and Mundi, Parbari and Sukarhai (which are 'bread' wheats and belong to the sub-species 'vulgare'). The principal diseases which attack wheat crop are: rust (girua), and smut (kajli). Other enemies of wheat include frost, drought, white ants, field rats, birds, deer and antelope. Baigas use certain traps and nets against animals and birds, but do not know any scientific remedy against rust or smut. Of course some devices of agricultural magic are used but seldom with any success and the Baiga in general are losing confidence in such methods.

Ramtila or Jagni and Mustard (Rai) have assumed great importance as money crops in recent times in the Baiga region. The former is a cheap and hardy oilseed which grows best on black soils, and also does well on barra. It is often sown mixed with Kodon. Mustard is sown mainly as a second crop in aboriginal backgardens after maize and occasionally on inundated land along river and nallah beds. It ripens in January, and is under favourable circumstances a most prolific yielder particularly in backgardens which are heavily manured. Linseed is another rent-paying oilseed of some importance. It is sown all over the Mandla district, but its extreme susceptibility to frost, rust and clouds prevent it from becoming a really popular crop. It is not grown over wide area by the Baiga. Gram is fairly important crop in the rural areas of Dindori tehsil. Its value as recuperative crop is well known, but only a small proportion of the wheat is sown mixed with gram. Cloudy weather brings in an attack of 'illi' or the gram caterpillar. Gram is sown till December and, therefore, usually left till after other crops have been sown. Among other crops cultivated by the Baiga are: urad, batra, masur, til, castor and hemp. The ground in which these crops are to be sown is usually given one ploughing in August and September. If moisture is plentiful and near the surface, linseed, batra and masur are usually sown broadcast and then ploughed in like Kodon and rice. If the moisture is beginning to sink into the ground and the surface soil is drying, they are sown in lines. The broadcast method is preferred by the aboriginal cultivator as it saves labour.

Utera System of double cropping

Closely connected with the subject of rice is that of second cropping. When the Region gets its normal quantity of September-October rains, practically all the black soil rice crop is double cropped, the best and heaviest land being generally sown with a second crop of wheat. The method of sowing is very simple, known locally as *utera* method. The seed is scattered broadcast among the standing rice plants just before or just after the time, about the third week of October, when the water which remains standing in the fields is finally drained away. Sometimes, however, the fields are ploughed up after the rice is reaped, and the seed sown in filled ground, The amount of moisture necessary for sowing varies with the kind of seed sown. Linseed and urad cannot stand soaking, and are sown after the water has been run off; batra, gram and masur are generally sown a few hours before the water is run off, and tiura which has a very hard husk, is allowed to soak in the fields for 24 hours before the sluices are opened. The after-crop grows up for about a month or so in the shade of rice plants which protect the young rabi seedlings from the rays of the hot October sun. But once the seedlings have grown stronger, the earlier the rice is reaped, the better the utera crop, as the presence of rice stunts the second crop which grows very rapidly when the rice is cut. After the rice is reaped in November the plants are strong enough to make their own way, and the heat of the sun has been reduced to proportions suitable for the spring crops. The crops usually sown in utera are linseed, peas, urad and lakhori. This second crop after rice considerably enhances the value of the heavier soils, for it entails no labour except that involved in sowing and harvesting, and is generally estimated to amount to twenty per cent of the general productiveness of the fields where it is sown. Baigas are, however, not in a position to take advantage of the double cropping as much as rural people due to certain reasons. Since they live on hill tops, the area of rice fields at their disposal is very limited. Secondly, utera method is possible only on black soil fields which are obtained mostly in the plains or in the Haveli area of the Mandla district where Baigas do not reside. Thirdly, the system requires additional supply of seeds even before the rice is available for consumption. If they are given more level patches of cultivable land by the Forest Department and seeds are supplied to them in time, Baigas will probably extend the area under utera crop.

Rotation of Crops and Manuring.

No definite rotation of crops is practised by the Baiga cultivators. Rice or Kodon-Kutki are sown in the same plots year after year. Wheat land in the Pathar is occasionally fallowed, or sown with a crop of hemp, but is otherwise fairly continuously cropped ; while in Dindori, the cultivators sometimes sow til or Kodon in the first year, and rice for a year or two afterwards, on newly broken wheat land. Til is usually sown by aboriginals on newly broken yellow soil. The value of gram as a recuperator after an exhausting crop of wheat or Kodon is everywhere well-known. No fixed principles are, however, observed, the aboriginal having implicit confidence in the inexhaustible richness of the Kabar soil. Besides, settled boundaries of the fields, increasing pressure of population and the expanding forest working plans do not encourage the aboriginal for rotation of crops. In fact, in barra land it is 'rotating cultivation' rather than rotation of crops that can allow the fields to recuperate their lost fertility.

Baigas are not manure-mind nor do they attach any importance to manure in their cultivation system. Since times immemorial they had been in the habit of changing their Bewar plots as soon as their fertility was exhausted. As shifting cultivators they believe in leaving the field itself for recuperating its lost fertility than to restore it through artificial methods. Thus nature is expected to manure it through re-vegetation and chemical action during ten to twelve years. The old practice has still its effects on Baigas except those of Baihar and Niwas who have become almost ordinary cultivators and who apply any type of manure in their fields. Even in case of *dhya* cultivation or *bewar* they do not consider burning of twigs or trees as a means of manuring the field, and the majority of them showed utter ignorance about fertilising powers of the ashes. Besides the effect of past traditions, there are certain factors operating even now which discourage the Baiga for adopting manuring practices like the ordinary cultivator. Baigas build their cottages on hill-tops with which are also attached their cattle sheds, while their fields are located at a long distance of three to four miles from the village. The route passes through ravines, valleys and ridges. Since bullock carts cannot be used in such tracts, it is difficult for the Baiga to transport the organic manure from the cattle shed to the farm. Nor can they make their cattle stay over the field during the night like the villagers of the plains for droppings and urination, as there is a constant danger of attack by carnivorous beasts. There appears to be one more reason for Baiga's indifference towards manuring. He is primarily a cultivator of coarse millets like Kodon-Kutki which, in fact, do not respond to manuring so well. Being stony soil the Barra is awfully poor in fertility and recoups its exhausted powers better through fallowing and natural vegetation than manuring.

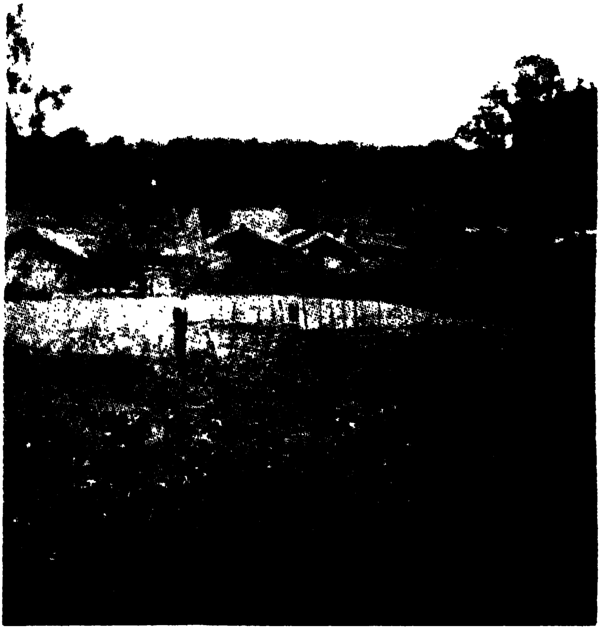
Backgarden Cultivation

The dark situation has, however, a silver lining too. Baigas maintain backgardens (bari) as a matter of habit. Crops like maize, mustard, castor, tobacco and vegetables are raised on this plot attached to the cottage itself. Since these crops require deep ploughing, good manuring and a constant watch, they are cultivated near the cottage where the wife and children can look after them. The bari is ploughed up with Khanta and sowing is done more methodically and carefully. Most of the home refuse, droppings of pigs and fowls and dung mixed with cattle urine are thrown into the bari which gets heavily manured by the process. The garden is strongly fenced from all sides with a small opening into the enclosure of the cottage. The rich crops grow luxuriantly on it and not only meet some of the important needs of the family by providing tobacco and maize, but also enable the Baiga to meet a part of their revenue obligations through commercial crop namely, mustard. The Baiga appreciate the value of bari in their home economy and therefore bestow maximum care upon it. On being told that heavy outturn on the bari is mainly due to heavy manuring, Baigas replied that it was not possible for them to manure their fields equally heavily nor could they watch them constantly. Hence their efforts were mainly concentrated on the bari. In these circumstances a practicable method of spreading the idea of manuring will be to increase the area under bari in each village and then encourage the Baiga to convert them into well manured fields of manageable sizes.

Seeds and Implements

As in the case of manuring, Baigas are likewise not very discriminating about seeds. They have hardly any idea of improved quality of seeds. Nomads as they were, Baigas broadcast seed of any quality available at the moment. Those who can save something out of the current yield for seed, put it in earthen storage or store it in baskets hung by the roof. In most of the cases seeds are eaten by insects or rats, rendering them useless for sowing purposes. Some Baigas preserve maize ears in their complete form and hang them by a high bamboo in open covered with a small umbrella to protect it from rains. The device is adopted for saving maize seeds from rats and insects. But every one is not able to save seeds from the current yield. An enquiry into the debt position of 350 families showed that nearly 16 per cent of the loans were borrowed for seeds. The money lender supplies these seeds out of the worst part of his stock. Thus the aboriginal cultivator has no alternative but to sow what he gets from his mahajan. Bad seeds bring bad crop which in its turn compels the farmer to borrow seeds again from the mahajan. The vicious circle never ends, and its cumulative effect on Baiga's economic position is disastrous.

As for agricultural implements, the condition is in no way better. The principal implements of the Baiga are *hal* or plough and the *bakhar* or paring harrow. The *hal* is fitted with either a light share for Barra and Sihar soils or a heavy share for black soil. Baiga's *hal* like that of an ordinary cultivator of the Region is extremely simple in construction, the woodwork being made by any local carpenter or by the Baiga himself and the iron share by the Agaria or the village smith. It consists of a beam about nine feet long, which serves as a shaft, and a body of some stout wood to which the shoe or bed of the share (*nas*) is attached. The iron share (*phar*), a narrow strip of metal sharpened to a point, is firmly affixed to the front of the *nas* in such a way that its point slightly



The Basi behind the hut.

A Baiga mother and her child.

overlaps the end of the wood. The plough weighs only a few pounds and can easily be carried from field to field. It cuts a furrow four or five inches in depth, but only tears the surface of the field. It is incapable of inverting the soil. When used for wheat crop a tube or *nari* is attached to the plough through which the seed falls into the furrow made by the share. All Baiga families do not have ploughs of their own. Practically in every village there are two or three families who do not cultivate any land independently or at all. In the former case they borrow plough and bullocks from others and in return render manual labour to the lender. The iron share, which is prepared by the Agaria, does not cost more than Rs. 2/8/-. For petty repair service of agricultural implements Baiga pays on an average twentyfive seers of grain to the Agaria per pair of bullocks annually. The *bakhar* or paring harrow is fitted with a share or pans and is used for breaking down the clods already ploughed up or for rooting up stubble. The Khanta or spud is used to dig up roots or to make holes in the ground. It is a favourite implement of the Baiga, who use it for making holes in their bewar-clearings for sowing pulse. The *hassia* or reaping hook is the sickle used to reap rice or Kodon, to cut grass, to weed, to cut meat. Axe or *tangiya* is used for clearing shrubs and small trees for the field. The winnowing is done in a basket known as a 'Supa' made by Baiga himself.

Baiga's Cattle

Baiga is not a professional cattle breeder or a dairyman. Nor do cattle or dairy products contribute any substantial amount to his total income. An enquiry into the income of 350 Baiga families revealed that only 1.2 per cent of the total income is earned from this source. But the number of cattlehead per family is not so low. Except a few who may be very poor, practically every family keeps some cattle. The less substantial cultivators, who have not sufficient plough cattle, either plough with hired animals, as in Raigarh Bichchea, or work on the Ponda system, as in East Dindori, by which in part return for six days' farm labour they are allowed to use others cattle for their own work on the seventh. Vast pasture lands in the forest, concessional grazing rates, less possibility of the cattle going astray and the need of surrendering cattle in discharge of debt encourage the Baiga to maintain a large number of cattle.

The cattle of the eastern parts of Dindori are known as Ramgarhis; they enjoy throughout the region a reputation for extra power and endurance. It is highly probable that they are not an independent stock, but the result of a fusion of a well known Rewa breed with the local breed.

In Raigarh Bichchea also there is a special breed of cattle and the graziers of that tract derive a thriving trade by the sale of them, people coming from as far as Chhindwara and Berar to purchase. There is, however, no local breed in the Balaghat tract. Cattle are imported from Saugor, Bhandara and Seoni. The chief cattle marts of the District are Wara Seoni, Talbarra, Katangi, Hirri and Mohgaon in Baihar.

The method of feeding cattle deserves special attention as herein lies the main reason of the poor breed. In the ploughing season the plough cattle are fed on wheat, rice and Kodon straw. When under yoke the cattle are given liberal quantities of salt, two to four chataks, three or four times a month. In the hot weather, when the natural pasture is very poor, cattle remain almost half fed. Stall-feeding is unknown among the Baiga. In rains the area available for grazing is restricted to the village waste in malguzari villages and the area reserved for grazing in the forest villages; although the latter gives a better yield of grass. The heavy work taken from plough cattle at a time when their vitality is lowest due to hot weather, starvation results in high mortality. It is, therefore, no surprise that stunted growth and low stamina of the Chattisgarh cattle have become a by-word throughout the State. The coarse and thick grasses are very poor in nutrition. Baiga's poor income does not allow him to give concentrates to his cattle. Specially in hot weather the conditions become worst. Cattle roam in valleys and hillocks in search of grass and water and come to the shed completely exhausted where they have nothing to eat.

Under-nourishment, indiscriminate breeding and yoking of milch cows in plough have impaired their milk yielding capacity. It is amazing for an outsider to see a cow surrounded by wild foliage yielding on an average not more than a quarter seer of milk in twentyfour hours. It has serious effects on Baiga economy. Due to poor milk yield the Baiga cannot make dairying as substantial source of income. Nor does milk or milk product form part of his diet. And above all Baiga's cattle are not considered a satisfactory security by the moneylender. Very few Baigas keep buffaloes. They are beyond the means of an ordinary family. Secondly, Baigas live in places where the ready demand for milk is absolutely nil. Thirdly, even in the southern part of the Baiga region, where he-buffaloes are used for rice cultivation by the aboriginals of the plains, Baigas do not keep buffaloes as their rice fields are of a very small size.

Incidence of disease is very high among the cattle of aboriginal tracts. Long spells of damp climate, under-nourishment, absence of anti-epidemic measures and aboriginal's belief in magic-cure are largely responsible for this state of affairs. In past the State used to have annual waves of rinderpest. During the past ten years, it is estimated. on an average 996.4 (excluding the Merged States) outbreaks of this disease were recorded resulting in a reported mortality of 8,803 heads of cattle per year. These are just the reported losses. The actual mortality was much higher and could be easily taken as three to four times the reported number. The Baiga region is no exception to this high incidence of rinderpest for Bilaspur tract recorded 219 outbreaks, Balaghat 103 and Mandla 76 during 1936-39.* There has been some improvement in the situation in recent years; but even now the Veterinary Department is able to confer protection only to 10 per cent of the bovine population of the State. The worst aspect of the situation is that improvement schemes of the Department have not paid as much attention to the Baiga region as it really deserves. Other diseases which take a heavy toll of cattle include haemorrhagie Septicaemia, black-quarter, anthrax, surra etc. Adequate prompt measures are required to control the epidemics. More quarantine stations should be opened with a view to form an effective ring of quarantine stations. A mobile veterinary unit should be established in each division to control epidemics and to assist the meagre local staff in quick and prompt combating of infections. The cattle belonging to professional cattle dealers who move from place to place should be compulsorily vaccinated, and the cattle markets should be checked with a view to detecting and treating infected cattle.

The livestock though numerous, is poor. The situation is capable of easy explanation. Baigas maintain a large number of cattle which are beyond their means. Large but poor breed thus becomes unremunerative. Quite a large proportion of cattle are underfed; many cattle owners maintain disproportionately large number of cattle compared to the available fodder and concentrate supplies. The control of epidemic and other cattle diseases is inadequate. The quality of large proportion of cattle is such that they can neither produce the proper type of work stock or yield an averagely good quantity of milk even under normal conditions of feeding. Persistent refusal of the aboriginal to grow crops that are useful for fodder and the consequent general practice of turning out cattle daily to graze in the open parts where they pick up what sustenance they can from frequently grazed pasture land, the embankments of rice fields and from the stubble which has been left in the fields after the crops have been reaped. Aboriginal cultivators often yoke their cows to the plough and thereby further deteriorate the breed.

Irrigation

Irrigation has little importance in Baiga's agriculture. In Dindori tehsil it is almost unknown ; while in Mandla tehsil it is practised to a limited extent. Wheat crop in this region seldom requires or gets irrigation. Rice crop is not irrigated regularly; in fact irrigation is confined to the spasmodic cutting of a few well-situated tanks when the latter monsoon fails. Construction of embankments is also not popular among the Baiga except in the rice tracts of Bilaspur and Baihar. The Baiga cultivator maintains that barra soil does not require irrigation, while the black soil (available only in small patches of land in the valleys) is 'Kaccha'. It is of such a character that embankments made of it are easily washed down and it costs more to repair them than what they are worth. Further, Baiga's experience shows that low-lying embanked lands suffer most severely from rust and frost. Like Dindori and Mandla tehsils, Mungeli tehsil (Bilaspur District) has no irrigation arrangements. In this tract the black clay in normal years does not require any artificial supply of water; and the level character of the ground renders the sources of supply unable to protect more than a very limited area. The sources of supply are almost entirely tanks, usually of no great size and permanent supply of water. The upper plateau of the Baihar tehsil is generally much intersected by nullahs while slopes are usually steep. It is difficult to obtain suitable sites for irrigation schemes in this part of the Balaghat District. Even important rivers like the Banjar, Tannaur and Jamunia have been found unsuitable for schemes of any size. The following table shows the area under irrigation from different sources of water supply in the Baigaland.*

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* Report of the Agricultural Policy Committee (Madhya Pradesh), 1951.

AREA UNDER IRRIGATION IN BAIGALAND—(1946-47)
(In thousand Acres)

District	Total gross cropped area	Total irrigated area			Sources of water supply		
		Under Kharif crops	Under Rabi crops	Total	Area irrigated by tanks & canals	Area irrigated from wells	Area irrigated from other sources
Balaghat	802.6	191.1	2.2	193.3	185.50	4.3	3.5
Bilaspur	2.287.0	202.2	4.5	206.7	197.1	2.7	6.8
Mandla	889.7	0.7	1.1	1.8	Below 50	0.9	0.8
Total for the whole Region	3.979.3	394.0	7.8	401.8	422.6	7.9	11.1

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*Based on 'Agricultural Statistics,' M.P. 1950 published by the Government of Madhya Pradesh.

The above table shows that out of 3,979.3 thousand acres, the total gross cropped area, only 401.8 thousand acres of land were under irrigation of all types—in other words only 10.05 per cent of the cropped area was irrigated in the region. The position is still worse in the Mandla District where Baigas are mainly concentrated. In this tract. .11 percent of the total cropped area was irrigated during 1946-47. The low percentage. much low as it is, does not reveal the real position of irrigation in the Baiga villages proper, for it includes figures of the whole area of the district including the plains where irrigation methods are well known. In fact, irrigation from canal or well is practically unknown among the Baiga of the Maikal range. It is practised to some extent by the Baiga of Baihar and Bilaspur who have adopted the Gond method of agriculture. The reasons for the absence of irrigation in Baiga villages are not far to seek. Baigas were shifting cultivators. They never believed nor do they believe even now, in any type of permanent improvements in their lands. They have an astounding faith in the natural fertility of the soil and, therefore, they seldom make any extra efforts for wresting from land more than what is bestowed by Nature. Secondly, Baigas live on hill tops and their fields are situated on ridges and hill slopes. The topography of the region does not permit digging of wells or construction of canals. Thirdly, Kodon and Kutki are their main crops which, in fact, do not require irrigation. If rains are normal these coarse millets grow quite nice even without irrigation. Fourthly, in the deep valleys where Baiga's rice fields are usually situated, the construction of embankments or tanks is not easy, for ordinary sand embankments are easily washed off by gushing torrents from the hills above.

Tank irrigation is, however, done in Baihar and Bilaspur districts—the rice tract. The tanks are usually provided with an outer reservoir called a *paithu*, from which the water passes into the tank through a cut in the upper embankment of the latter. The effect of this reservoir is to increase the volume of water held up, and to enable some of the silt to settle before the water passes into the source of the village supply of drinking water. When irrigation is necessary, water is first drawn off from the *paithu* and allowed to run into the fields on the highest level which can be reached. When these have been irrigated and no more water can be obtained from the *paithu*, the tank itself is breached at a lower level and the water is allowed to run into the fields. Unless there are two or three tanks in a village the breaching of tank is avoided, if at all possible. There is also a strong religious prejudice against the breaching of a tank by a man who has made it himself. A few of the fields nearby the tank, reservoir or pond are sometimes irrigated by a basket-lift called a *chhapa*. Very few of the tanks are large, and the catchment areas are seldom, if ever, as much as a square mile in extent. At the time of settlement in Balaghat it was found that the average area that could be irrigated from a tank was 28 acres. The tanks are seldom provided with waste-weirs, and many of them burst in consequence. The cultivation of the beds of irrigation tanks is forbidden by the village customs roll, as it is found that such cultivation, known locally as *agar*, leads to the owner reducing the size and capacity of the tank, and often to his cutting the bank too soon, to let the water run off, so that he may begin his cultivation.

The other sources of irrigation of any importance besides tanks are nullahs, which in suitable places are dammed by the people, who run the water so held up into any fields near the nullah which it will reach. They usually have to make recourse to the basket-lift to get all the water that they want. Then there are the embankments known as *gatiyas*, or *mundis*, used for irrigating the rice fields below them ; these, when the water is drawn off, are ploughed up and sown with rabi crops. A large number of stone terraces have also been built across the smaller nullahs ; these offer no impediment to the water, but check to a very large extent the annual carrying off of silt. The nullahs quickly fill up and afford the very best of soil for cultivation.

Backwardness of Aboriginal Agriculture

After reviewing the different aspects of Baiga agriculture. we can now state certain basic facts about it. Baiga's agriculture is still passing through the initial stages of primitive system. Technologically as well as organisationally it is in a very backward state. Neither it is staple farming like that of an ordinary Indian cultivator nor is it an organised enterprise like that of the Western farmer. Baiga's present technique of cultivation shows a little improvement over his traditional Bewar. He still practises 'rotating cultivation' and leaves his barra fields fallow from three to five years. His plough simply scratches the surface of the ground. Sowing is done by broadcasting. Irrigation of the field is a rarity. Hardly any measures are taken against crop diseases and pests. The only major difference between his old axe-cultivation and the present technique is that in the latter he does not fell and burn trees, and the size of the farm is smaller.

The Baiga system of cultivation lacks in agricultural traditions. The cultivator of the plains has set practices of farming. He selects a plot of land for a particular crop and in the majority of the cases his judgment is found correct, for his practical knowledge of soils is based on a long experience. His implements are often in accordance with the nature of the soil and bullock-power. Age long experiments have given him a Calendar of crop rotation. And above all, the village agriculture, if not so well adjusted to the domestic needs and cash requirements of the farmer, at least, enables the farmer to keep his head above the water, even in times of crisis. But the Baiga have no such experience or traditional practices to help them. In fact, they were a tribe of nomads and shifting cultivators upto 1867. Besides, their change over to plough cultivation was not voluntary and evolutionary. Government orders brought about this sudden change. As a result. the tribe has not adjusted itself completely to the new technique. It has retained the outlook of a shifting cultivator, and yet tries to eke out its living from plough-cultivation. It is, therefore, no surprise that Baiga treats the plough-cultivation as a source of coarse millets for his cooking pot, and shows an extra-ordinary love for forest adventures. Baiga's attitude towards agriculture explains his preference to forest work over agriculture. The former source contributes 44.8 per cent of the total income of the Baiga family while the latter 42.6. Even the present day Baiga is, thus, struggling hard, consistent with his past, to link the forest work with his agriculture. This attempt on the one hand, acts as an obstacle to agricultural improvements, on the other, helps the Baiga in creating a second line of defence against scarcity conditions. In the chapter on Income we analyse 'forest work as a source of income to the Baiga. Let us see how it has affected his technique and implements.

Lack of an agriculturist's outlook, sudden changeover to plough-cultivation, limited means and the natural conditions have kept Baiga's agriculture at a very low point technologically. Baiga's knowledge and experience of different kinds of soils is very poor. At times he is unable to decide the suitability of a plot of land for a particular crop. Like all primitive cultivators, he has an unshakable belief in the natural powers of the soil. Most of the Baigas' fields are unmanured and unimproved. The number of ploughings except in the rice tract seldom exceed one. In many places and on many occasions a Baiga avoids ploughings altogether. Depending on nature, he broadcasts seeds or sows them in holes made with a digging stick. His fields give appearance of wild growth. He wards off wild animals as long as he is on the field. Crops are always exposed to the risk of frost, draught, insects and pests. Except some devices of agricultural magic, he is not aware of any preventive or protective measures against natural calamities. For instance, he is solely dependent on monsoon rains. As shown earlier only 10 per cent of the cropped area is irrigated in the Baiga region. and, if the level plains of the region where Baigas do not live are excluded, the percentage will decline below 1 (as is the case of the Mandla District--the main area of the Baiga tribe). The rotation of crops is a novelty to the Baiga, for they are still in the habit of changing the field rather than rotating crops on the same field. Until 1867 they were cultivators of vast forest lands and, therefore, used to raise a variety of crops on a field at the same time. Their implements are extremely simple and crude. Baiga's *hal* is an apology for a plough. The share is very small and the furrows cut by it are only 4 to 6 inches in depth. Nor it turns over the earth. *Bakkhar*—pair of harrow—is not popular among the Baiga for their fields are small in size and often situated on hill tops or slopes where *bakkhar* cannot be used with much advantage. Other agricultural implements include an axe, digging stick and sickle. All other implements used by an ordinary cultivator in reaping, winnowing, threshing, and in bullock cart and well irrigation, are conspicuous by their absence in a Baiga home. A visit to the Baiga village leaves the impression that if Indian agriculture is backward, the Baiga agriculture is primitive in every manner.

CHAPTER VI

FOREST ECONOMY

By tradition Baiga is a forest dweller. Forests have shaped the habitat and economy of the tribe. The Baiga are as much a living part of the forest as the wild animals. In the Plateau Zone the term forest dweller means a Baiga. An old Baiga of Dharkutta aptly remarked "As fish cannot live outside the water, we Baigas, cannot survive without forest". Forests are the very fountain of life for the tribe. Most of the activities pertaining to food quest are performed in the forest. Baiga consumes coarse grains which grow luxuriantly on hill slopes and forest lands. Fruits, flowers, leaves, roots and tubers which supplement and balance otherwise his predominantly cereal diet, are obtained from the forest. The wild animals from tiger to mouse which enter Baiga's dish, are found in dense forests and near perennial streams. Fish a delicacy in Baiga's diet, are caught in small streams, ponds and water clogs spread in the interior pockets of forests. And the last but the sweetest of all—honey is collected from the canopy-covered forests. In fine, forests supply the prime necessity—namely food to the tribesmen.

Mahua flowers which grow abundantly all over the region fill aboriginals' cup of liquor. A flowering Mahua tree besides presenting an enjoyable sight provides sips of enjoyment without which Baiga's life would remain an endless monotony. The Mahua liquor introduces a peculiar buoyancy and romance in tribal life. It is no wonder that in Baiga mythology, the Bara Deo is supposed to live in a Saj tree and the first romance of the bridal couple traditionally takes place in the midst of forest. Forests quench tribals' thirst in another way too. Digging of well is not so common in the Baiga region due to rocks. Natural water streams locally known as Jhiria are the only source of water for drinking or washing. The forest canopy prevents these streams from drying up during the summer and thus saves the tribal population from drought.

Being of nomadic blood Baiga does not build an elaborate house. But even for the simple and little hut he needs some material. Forests supply him bamboos, timber, thatching grass, fibres and clays for his hut—an effective protection for himself and his cattle against wind, rain, cold, and wild animals. Forests thus enable him to raise a shelter out of felled material at a negligible cost.

The little hut is kept warm and lighted with fuel collected from the forests. With the help of fire Baiga is able to protect himself against extreme cold of the Maikal range. Since Baigas wear very scanty clothes, the whole family coils round fire during the night. Wood is a source of light too. Ordinarily a Baiga family does not burn lamp. A housewife works under the flickering flames of fuel. To keep the flame burning, the hearth is fed with wood without break. In cooking also the Baiga wife burns fuel heavily. Coarse grains, roots and tubers need to be boiled for two to three hours at a very high temperature. Meat preparations also require continuous and heavy fire. But fuel is needed still more badly outside the hut. Baigas live in deep forests where attacks by wild animals are so frequent that he must guard himself and his animals against them Baiga's weapon—an arrow and spear—cannot be aimed at in the dark. The safest method during the night is to ward off animals with fire. Therefore, fire smoulders throughout night in the village square and acts as a warning to wild beasts. One marvels at Nature's arrangement—forests provide shelter to wild animals, but they also supply fuel to the forest tribesmen to ward off the wild. Fuel collected from forests heats Baiga's cooking pot, lights his home, warms him during winter and wards off wild beasts during the night.

Forests enable the Baiga not only to heat up their cooking pot, but also supply raw stuff for it. Baiga derives nearly 44.8 per cent of his income from forest work. Barra soils of forest regions give very poor yields and cannot be subjected to continuous cultivation over long periods. The aboriginal, therefore, engages himself in supplementary employment. In fact before the tribe settled as a plough cultivator, forest work (collection of forest produce and hunting) was its primary occupation. And even now cultivation and forest work (*Kur Kabar*—a local term) are of equal importance in the forest regions. In forest villages, major part of employment is provided by the Forest Department. Villagers of the boarder areas are also engaged in departmental work road repair and transport of timber. Forest contractors employ a large number of aboriginals. But Baiga exploits wild forests in his own way. He collects innumerable kinds of roots, fruits, tubers, leaves, fibres, herbs, honey and wax, and sells them to other tribesmen of neighbouring villages or in the weekly markets. Bamboos, fibres and leaves are utilised in cottage crafts like basketry, rope making and roof-thatching. Forests are thus an important source of employment and maintain an equilibrium in Baiga's economic life.

Forests support not only the Baiga but also their cattle. It would not have been possible for the Baiga, who are poor cultivators,

The Gate of Kanha Sanctuary.

to maintain large number of cattle without vast grazing lands. They are not professional herdsmen like the Ahir, yet an average Baiga family does keep a good number of cattle for which grazing facilities are essential as stall-feeding is practically unknown in the tract. Besides fodder, forests provide shady shelter to the cattle. Natural streams of water and small ponds of forest valleys are the unfailing source of water supply for the cattle. The Baiga boy only keeps a watch over the herd, the rest is provided by Nature—fodder, water and shelter.

Forests are also an effective prop in periods of crisis. In times of food scarcity, edible forest produce proves an insurance against famine. Innumerable roots and tubers which the Baiga alone knows are taken as substitutes for foodgrains without much inconvenience. In such times the cultivator of the plains becomes helpless and the aid from outside alone can save him. But Baigas have a wonderful capacity of finding famine-relief in the lap of nature. In the crisis of disease, herbs and leaves come to the aid of the Gunia in curing various ailments. Modern medical facilities including Ayurvedic medicines are not available in these remote parts. Therefore Baigas have evolved their own pharmacology based on local herbs and roots. Naturally forests are more than a foliage to the Baiga. They are a source of food, drink, fuel, shelter and an effective measure against famine and disease.

Forests are woven in the Baiga myth. Bhagvan, Baigas believe, ordained the Nanga Baiga to make his living from the earth. "You will cut wood and carry it on your shoulders. You will dig roots and eat them. Your wife will pick leaves and sell them. All the kingdoms of the world may fall to pieces, but he who is made of earth and is Bhumiaraja, shall never forsake it."* Their rituals, worship, ceremonies, songs and dances abound in references to forest and its beauty. In olden days the bride and bridegroom enjoyed their honeymoon in the forest. Even now a dense forest-patch, deep valley or bank of a river excites the aboriginal. They are places of outing, hunting, fishing and merry making. In them Baiga's life throbs more freely. Nothing makes a Baiga so happy as the sight of a wild forest and the breathing of fresh air gushing out of it. But forests mean something more to him. His superiority among other tribesmen is based upon his knowledge of flora and fauna. Though not a silviculturist in the modern sense of the term, a Baiga possesses marvellous knowledge of different species of trees, plants and creepers, their seasonal history, technique of exploitation and their uses. He is the wiseman whose advice is sought on all matters concerning forests and their wild life.

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* **Elwin : Op. Cit. p. 318**

The times have, no doubt, changed and his hold is loosening. Forests which provided the basis of Baiga's tribal superiority in olden days are now acting as a wall against culture-contact. Many Baigas explained why they chose to live on forest covered hill tops. They have retired into the inaccessible parts of forests as they were looked down upon by the civilised and other half-acculturised tribals like the Gond and the Panka. The Baiga frankly confess that they do not come out of forests as the dressed up rural people ridicule their half-naked figures. Forests have consequently ceased to be a symbol of the tribal pride. Baigas therefore consider them as curtains over their primitive culture despised by their neighbours—the Gond and Hindu cultivators. Let us, however, see what place Baigas occupy in the forest economy of the region.

MAJOR FOREST PRODUCE

Sal Timber

By 'major produce' the Sal tree is generally understood, for teak is not very plentiful, nor is it exploited to the same extent as the former. The sal timber may be inferior to the teak for carpentry, but it is superior in many ways. It has a straight, firm grain, which enables it to stand an immense amount of crushing, thus making it the most suitable of all woods for railway sleepers. There is no standard *classification of timber* in the State for the details of classification vary greatly according to local customs. There are special trade names for various classes and sizes of timber in different forest divisions. Timber may be round, squared or sawn.

The felling season in the Plateau Zone is determined mainly by three factors, namely, Silvicultural considerations, climatic conditions and the supply of labour. All the three factors are favourable during the cold weather when the best coppice shoots are produced and also when labour is most readily available in the aboriginal areas. However, from the point of view of seasoning and durability felling is carried out best during the rains when the amount of reserve food material in trees is least. Timber felled during the previous rains is preferred as it is partially seasoned and lighter and thus easier to transport. Wood intended for the manufacture of charcoal is felled short before it is put in the kiln, as very dry wood is not suitable for charcoal burning. In many remote forests, trees of inferior species are unsaleable either as fuel or as charcoal, and such trees can most suitably be felled in the summer when aboriginal labour is idle and when felling of more valuable trees is undesirable.

But the above considerations except where felling is carried out departmentally, are not taken into account by the contractors or malguzars. In recent years due to war supplies and anti-social attitude of the malguzars, forests after forests have been felled indiscriminately without any regard to season, future regeneration. effects on grazing lands and the *nistar* facilities to the neighbouring villages.

Axe is the most important tool of the wood-cutter as it is used not only for felling but also for trimming, splitting, logging and the dressing of stumps. The typical axe consists of a metal head and a wooden handle. The edge of the blade is slightly curved, as a straight edge is liable to have its corners broken off and does not penetrate into the wood so well. The weight of ordinary felling axe varies from 1½ to 4 lbs., according to the strength of the user and the purpose for which the axe is to be used. For lopping or trimming branches or for doing cleanings and thinnings in young regenerated forests or in plantations, the aboriginal uses a light axe known as *tangiya*, indispensable companion of the Baiga. Unless he works under the Forest Department or a forest contractor, a Baiga will invariably be found using his *tangiya* in felling trees for his domestic use. Baiga's skill at the axe is well known. Even his neighbouring tribesmen wonder at the speed and efficiency with which a Baiga wields the *tangiya*. Given free choice, a Baiga will always prefer an axe made by *Agaria* (blacksmith) to one sold in weekly market. Agarias make three kinds of axes. The *tangiya* is the ordinary and most serviceable axe. It is used for cutting wood and weighs about a seer. The *Tangli* is of the same pattern, but lighter (only 5 chattaks) and can be used for cutting bamboos and bark. The *Tabli* (weighing ½ seer) has a much broader cutting edge, and can do the same work more quickly.

Baiga uses other implements also while felling trees on account of the Forest Department or forest contractor. The saw is used commonly at depots (paraos). The great advantage of the saw over the axe is that it makes a thin straight cut and thus causes much less waste of timber. Moreover *baglis* (side planks) which are produced by sawing are nearly always readily saleable. Saws are either two-handed or one handed according as to whether they are worked by two men or by one man. The former are generally used for various forest purposes, one-handed saws being chiefly used by carpenters or for house hold uses. Some of the important types of saws are: The Cross-cut-saw, Pit-saw and the Frame-saw, Another important tool used for trimming and squaring timber, for hollowing out boats, and for dressing the stools of coppice fellings is adze. In shape it resembles the axe except that the cutting edge is at right angles to handle instead of in the same plane with it.

Trees are felled by cutting either above or below ground level. The latter system is employed only when the extraction of stumps is desirable, as in constructing a forest road or in clearing a site for some purpose. Felling above ground may be either with the axe or with the axe and saw combined. In the Sal forests generally both the tools are employed. The technique of felling a tree with the axe may be explained. A cut is first made on the side to which the tree is intended to fall. The cut is as low as possible and extends a little beyond the centre of the tree. A second cut is then made on the opposite side of the tree a few inches above the level of the first cut and is continued until the tree gradually falls over on the opposite side. If necessary, the direction of the fall of the tree may be further controlled by men pushing the bole in the required direction or by a rope previously tied to the upper portion of the tree. The method of felling with axe alone has certain distinct advantages. In aboriginal areas labour for felling with the axe is easier to obtain than Sawyer's labour. Secondly, the fall of the tree can be easily guided. Thirdly, the axe is more suitable for work on difficult ground. Fourthly, the aboriginal is better off with the axe than with the saw. But the method is slightly wasteful, for not only is the wood from the cut wasted in the form of chips, but the wood comprising the wedge-shaped end of the log has usually to be trimmed off when the timber is concerted. In departmental operations or fellings carried out by contractors, therefore, the axe and the saw are combined. First a cut is made with the axe on that side of the tree to which it is intended to fell. The saw is then applied at the same level on the opposite side of the tree. It is a better way with large timber as there is less waste. The third method is felling by the roots and the extraction of stumps. The base of the tree is first dug and the roots are cut through. The roots on that side to which the tree is to fall are cut last. Pull by a rope or push by men hastens the fall. This method is adopted in a road alignment or in clearing a site.

The felled trees are not left for long in the forest. A semi-industrial process known as 'conversion of wood' starts when the wood has dried a little. After a tree is felled, all the side branches are trimmed off and the bole is then divided with the axe or saw into sections. The length of the logs will depend upon the length of the felled tree, demands of the market, the purpose for which the timber is required and the method of transport and to facilitate carting, rough squaring with the adze is generally done in the coupe, either at the felling site or at a coupe depot. In the Sal forests, trees are usually converted into sleepers at the felling site. Wood for sale as fuel, is merely cut into lengths convenient for carting. The fuel is then sold at a fixed price per stack. Wood for conversion into charcoal, on the other hand, is cut into lengths of convenient size for placing in the kiln.

Coupes are cleared either under departmental supervision or by contractors. The bullock cart is used almost everywhere for the *transport* of material within the coupe. In the Baiga region forest roads are sufficiently developed in the Motinala, Kanha-Kisli and Baihar divisions where motor transport is fast spreading. However, there are certain tracts where even the use of bullock cart is not possible due to rocks and valleys. For example, the entire Baiga Chak South of Kanhari-Chara Road, presents a topographical impossibility as far as road transport is concerned. Similarly the long strip of highland from Amarkantak to the north-western boundaries of Baihar tehsil locally known as Bandhan (Boundary) is a difficult track for road transport. In such steep hilly areas the timber is slid or dragged length-wise down the hill-sides on roughly cleared tracks, known as slides. Until the converted timber can be removed from the coupe, it is stocked carefully so that it may not warp or crack, or be attacked by insects and fungi. Usually it is kept raised on hillets wood or on boulders.

Manufacture of Charcoal

There is little local demand for fuel in forest areas of the Plateau Zone. The wood which is not fit for timber is, therefore, converted in some places into charcoal. Dhaora, Saj, Arjun, Babul and Mokha woods are best suited for charcoal. Other species used are : Tinsa, Bhirra, Haldu, Kalam, Bija etc. Woods of different value as charcoal are burnt in separate kilns as charcoal made from such species as Dhaora and Saj realises higher prices than charcoal from inferior wood.

The technique of charcoal making may be described briefly. The burning wood if exposed to the air converts into gases and a small quantity of ash remains. But if the air is excluded by some device, the wood is converted into a number of gases and liquids and the product remaining is charcoal. The kiln is a device of excluding air during the burning of wood. The shape of the kiln is like a large overturned basket. In the centre of kiln a chimney is constructed of green saplings of Dhaora tree 2" to 2½" in diameter, planted in a triangle about 10" apart 1½" below and 5' above ground. Near the chimney chips of dry bamboos and of dry wood are set. Above them are arranged hillets of wood vertically in three tiers, the lower two of which are 2' high each and the top tier 1' high and made up of hillets of green Saj wood arranged horizontally. The total height of kiln is usually 5' to 7'. After the kiln is built, the wood is covered with leaves, twigs and grasses and the whole is plastered over with earth puddle, leaving the chimney uncovered. Some chips, leaves and twigs are dropped into the chimney and some holes are made in a circle at the top of the kiln. A few burning charcoals are thrown into the chimney to light the kiln and the mouth of the chimney is partially closed. The fire spreads outwards from the centre in the form of an inverted cone with the base gradually widening outwards. The various holes made in the kiln are opened or closed as carbonisation proceeds. The kiln while burning, has to be watched day and night, to see that the covering does not crack and break, and that the vent holes are closed in time. Cracks are immediately plastered to prevent the entry of air. The kiln burns completely in seven or eight days when all the holes and vents are closed and the whole covering well plastered. In about a week's time the charcoal in the kiln cools down.

The present method of preparing charcoal from wood, it is pointed out, is very crude and wasteful. But it requires little or no effort. The people who produce charcoal are generally so poor that it is much more economical from their point of view to produce charcoal in their own way. In order to improve the technique of charcoal making the Forest Department may keep in stock improved types of portable kilns for the use of charcoal makers. The Forest Research Institute, Dehra Dun, has devised an improved type of kiln, 'Frikiln' which is claimed to be highly efficient. It can be taken in pieces and transported from place to place. The cost of this kiln is Rs. 500. Its average production of charcoal per month is claimed to be 9,770 lbs. using 34,730 lbs. of oven dry wood.*

Aboriginal labour

In both the industries—timber extraction and charcoal making—the Forest Department as well as the private contractors, engage aboriginal labour of neighbouring villages. Since coupes are located in the interior, cultivators or landless labourers do not like to go there unless compelled by economic reasons. The only alternative, then, left is the aboriginal. In forest villages where most of the population is aboriginal, the Forest Department has at its disposal the labour strength of the whole village. In fact the objective of organising these villages is 'to secure a permanent supply of labour in the forest reserves, and to provide for members of forest tribes who are, under strict system of conservancy, debarred from supporting themselves by dhya cultivation'.† The percentage of primitives is, therefore, considerably high among the forest workers. But among them Baigas' number is not in proportion to their special skill as wood-cutters, their knowledge of forest and their residence in the deep forest pockets. A Baiga earns nearly 44.8 per cent of his income from forest and road work, yet the employment

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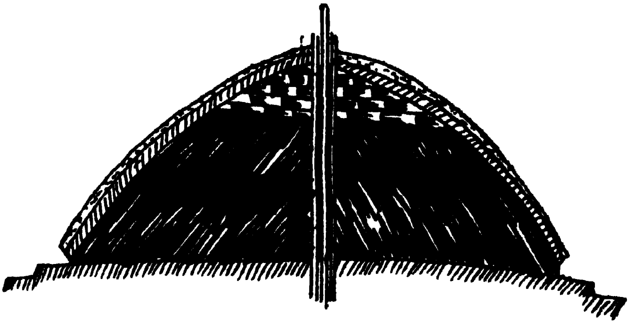
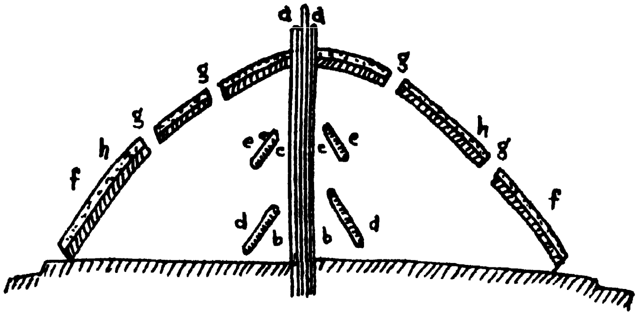
* Report of Industrial Survey Committee, C P. & Berar 1939 Part II, Vol. I. p. 14.

† Forest Manual, C. P. & Berar, Vol. I, p. 69.

A Kiln





Section of the kiln

aa	Dhaora saplings tied with climbers. to form the chimney.
bb	Chips of bamboos.
cc	Chips of dry wood.
dd	Saj billets of green wood.
ee	Dry saj billets.
ff	Walls made of clods of earth.
gg	Draught holes.
hh	Plaster of earth on covering of leaves and twigs.

from this source is irregular. Besides its seasonal character, continuity in the forest and road work largely depends upon the decisions of the Forest Department or the activities of the forest contractors. Conditions of transport also influence the volume of work in a forest area. Wherever the means of transport are developed, forests have become accessible for commercial exploitation. As a result, the employment opportunities have expanded and the forest work has become the main prop of aboriginal economy. The cases of Mandla and Baihar Tehsils where roads have penetrated deep into the forests, confirm this statement. Here Baigas earn 68.8 and 63.4 per cent of their total income from forest and road work respectively, while just contrary is the case of the Baiga Chak and the southern parts of Dindori tehsil where due to undeveloped means of communication, forests still remain inaccessible and unsuitable for commercial operations. Forest work in these tracts contributes only 3.94 and 20.4 per cent to the total income of the Baiga families respectively. Since the real Baigas live away from roads on hill tops and inaccessible places, the forests in their surroundings are neither exploited by the Forest Department nor by the forest contractors. The Baiga in such areas, therefore, do not get as much forest work as that in the more opened up tracts like the Baihar and Mandla tehsils. Inaccessibility of the forests in the southern region thus reduces the volume of forest employment for the Baiga. Another factor responsible for this state of affairs is the notion held by the Forest Department officials and forest contractors that Baiga is an irregular, lazy and undependable worker. It is true that he has not yet developed a workers' outlook, or a sense of responsibility expected of a permanent type of industrial worker. He has a nomad's blood in him. A traditional food gatherer and hunter that he was, he cannot be expected to stick to a particular job for long. Though shifting cultivation has been prohibited throughout the State, Baiga still retains the habit of changing his job during the year from cultivation to hunting, from hunting to root collection and fishing, and then again, preparing for the cultivation. He still tries to stick to his occupational cycle during the year. Forest work which often necessitates long absence from home, does not fit into his socio-economic conditions. Forest, or road work suits neither his temperament, nor his domestic life. It is, therefore, not surprising that he is found irregular in attendance and less responsible in work. The remedy, however, lies not in refusing employment to the Baiga but partly in changing the conditions of work for them and partly in remoulding Baiga's outlook.

From the point of view of transport charges also, it has not yet become an economic proposition to fell trees and extract timber in some of the interior parts of the Baiga region like the Baiga Chak, northern boundary of the Kawardha and Mungeli tehsil and southern parts of the Kanha-Motinala area. High transport charges discourage even the forest contractors to start operations in these areas. Consequently the number of Baigas engaged in forest work is not so high. So also in the manufacture of charcoal Baigas do not get much employment for they live in areas wherefrom the export of charcoal to the urban centres is not economical.

Minor Forest produce

Minor forest produce includes all kinds of forest produce other than the timber and firewood. It comprises vegetable, animal and mineral products of countless varieties. Though called 'minor', these products play a major role in the primitive economy. The collection, disposal and utilisation of minor produce afford enough scope for aboriginals' initiative, traditional skill and the spirit of freedom. Some of the vegetable and animal products are of edible value. Others provide him material for his hut and some add variety and comfort to his dreary and monotonous life. The collection, partial processing and the selling of minor produce is an important occupation of the aboriginal and contributes nearly 8·6 per cent to the total income of the Baiga family. Where the weekly market is easily accessible or a village of mixed character is located in the neighbourhood, Baigas earn 27.8 per cent of their income from this source as in the Dindori area and 18.0 per cent in the Mandla tract. But the real importance of the minor produce lies not in what an aboriginal sells in the market but in the manner in which it enables a Baiga to supplement and balance his diet. In times of famine it is with edible roots and fruits that a Baiga and for that matter other tribesmen also, tide over the crisis. Gathering and processing of edible produce demands ingenuity, dexterity and courage on the part of the worker. Baiga's efficiency, knowledge of local flora and fauna, courage and tenacity are at their best when he goes out in search of roots, honey or wild game. In fact, Baiga feels his own while he acts as a food gatherer and hunter. He feels elated, for it is in this sphere that he excels other tribesmen. He is reminded of his past glory as the Bhumia and of the racial superiority as the true Pashupati. The feeling is based not merely on the mythical past. It is related with the present too. Baiga's role in the collection and transport of major produce is that of a subordinate. He works as a hired labourer either under an official of the Forest Department or a forest contractor. This does not permit scope for his individual qualities. But in the case of minor produce he works independently and, therefore, feels more contented.

Next to grass which is discussed later, bamboos are the most important minor forest product. The favourite locality for a bamboo clump is the soft and more or less sodden soil along the banks of rivers and nallahs. with which the whole Baiga region is saturated. Bamboos, therefore, grow in abundance throughout the Baiga land except in rocky places like some parts of Dindori and Garhi Ranges. Only two species occur in the Region : the common *bans* or bamboo scientifically known as Dendrocalamus strictus and the more frequent *Katang* bamboo (Bambusa arundinacea).

Bamboos are useful for countless purposes such as roofing, walling, flooring, matting, tool handles, spear shafts, masts. carriage shafts, bamboo furniture, tent poles, waling sticks, Kawar poles, basket making and musical instruments. On dry soils the bamboo culms sometimes grow solid, known as male bamboos and are used as lance shafts, lathis and for other purposes.

The bamboo forests of a division are divided into a convenient number of bamboo felling series, and each felling series is demarcated into four coupes, one of which is open to extraction each year, while the other three are left unworked. This arrangement of extraction by rotation permits clumps to regenerate for three years. Even when a particular coupe is subjected to extraction, certain rules are enforced in order to prevent indiscriminate felling and to ensure future regeneration of the clumps. Tender culms that are below 6 inches from ground level are not allowed to be cut nor is digging or extraction of rhizomes permitted under the rules.

The most common method of exploitation of bamboos is by sales on rated passes at fixed rates per hundred, the rates varying according to the quality of bamboos and the accessibility of the coupe. In Balaghat Division, however, the system is based on monopoly-royalty basis. A per hundred rate is fixed for each coupe and the sole right of extraction is then sold by auction. The purchaser has to pay the amount bid for the monopoly right. and in addition he has to purchase the rates passes to cover the cost of bamboos extracted by him. A small patch is demarcated in the coupe for the *nistar* facilities of the local villages which ordinarily mean and include :*

(*a*) Dry wood fit only for fuel
(*b*) Dry Bamboos
(*c*) Grass
(*d*) Thorns
(*e*) Leaves
(*f*) Bakal

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* **Forest Manual (C. P. & Berar) Vol. I, Pp. 117-122**
Watts, H. C. A. Manual of Forest Utilisation, Pp. 49-50.

Baigas cut bamboos either for bonafide domestic use or as hired labourer under the private contractor or the Forest Department. Nowhere Baigas were found extracting bamboos for purely commercial purposes. Some of them, no doubt, make baskets, supas, mats and nets but the majority of them prepares these articles for domestic use. The reasons for Baiga's secondary role in bamboo trades are not far to seek. Purchase of bamboo coupes at a public auction and the extraction and transport of bamboos to the rail point require huge capital, organisational machinery and experience of trade and marketing which Baigas lack badly. The number of Baigas engaged even in felling work carried out by contractors is not very large. Forest contractors prefer to take bamboo coupes near the road of railway station, while Baigas live far away on hill tops or in deep forests. Consequently their share in felling and collection work is not as much as it should be. Whatever little felling which Baigas do is carried out for meeting their domestic needs. Limited local demand for bamboo articles further discourages Baigas from expanding their handicrafts. There is another handicap in the form of competition by an occupational caste—Basod—which claims privileged deal in basketry. In many villages, therefore, Baiga's demand for bamboos is strictly restricted to their family requirements. The difficulties of transport and marketing further obstruct the utilisation of bamboos by the aboriginal. They are unable to dispose off the raw bamboos or manufactured articles beyond a certain distance. Variations in local rates of bamboos often compel Baigas in some villages to fetch bamboos from long distance. The rate in all the forest ranges of Baihar tehsil is Re. 1/- per hundred green bamboos. By contrast the rate in the immediately adjacent forests of the Mandla district is only 8 annas a hundred, and in consequence the basket-makers buy in Mandla.

Edible Forest Products

By far the most important edible product of the forest is the flower of the Mahua tree (Bassia Latifolia). The flower is white, sweet and sickly to taste and smell. It has inestimable value as foodstuff for the forest tribes. Mahua is also used as base material in distillation of country liquor in Baiga region. Aboriginals extract oil from mahua seeds known as "gulli", and use it for cooking and lamps. Its foliage affords excellent shade except in March, and its brilliant hue form a pleasing contrast to a dull-coloured April landscape. Above all *mahua* is one of the aboriginal's main safeguards against the effects of crop failure. Old records show that in all the famines jungle fruits and roots enabled the tribesmen to meet the crisis with confidence.* Mahua collection is a productive employment in which all the members of the family including children can be gainfully engaged. Almost all over the Baiga region there is plenty of Mahua at the end of March and in April. Forest laws do not impose any restrictions on the collection of mahua flowers in the forest villages. However, in ryotwari tracts a fee known as *paidawar* of annas -/5/- is charged from each house which permits people to collect all edible roots, fruits, flowers and gums from a Government forest. But Government ryots living in ryotwari villages are entitled to free enjoyment of *nistar* and *paidawar* within the ryotwari area of their own village. In forest villages the aboriginals are completely free to collect and store mahua flowers in any quantity. In view of the importance of Mahua products in aboriginal's diet, drink, and as source of light, some observations may be made with regard to the preservation and regeneration of mahua trees in primitive villages. Many people like to plant mango and other trees but hardly anyone takes the trouble to plant the mahua tree. In course of time—it is feared--the existing mahua trees will die of old age for there is no natural regeneration outside Government forests. The tribal people will lose a valuable tree. Government should, therefore, devise ways and means for planting new mahua trees preferably through the Forest Department. In addition Forest Department should be instructed not to eradicate this tree from the Reserve Forests.

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* Mandla District Gazetteer Pp. 181-190.

Among fruits the most popular is mango. During the season Baiga women and children go to the jungle and collect baskets full of raw mangoes. There is no restriction on their collection. The housewife fries them in oil with salt and chillies, or prepares mango chutney, which is eaten for many days. If the crop is in abundance, some mangoes are dried for preservation. Baigas generally do not allow mangoes to ripen. Char is another important fruit. Its kernels known as Chironji are sold to pedlars or in the weekly market. They are also powdered and made into a kind of bread. Tendu is a fruit of great value in times of scarcity. Other fruits are : Jamun, Khamer, Gular, Ber, Bel, Bhilma, Kakai, Khirni, Mahul, Lasora etc.

Baiga is a great lover of leafy vegetables. The wife along with her children goes to the jungle and gathers innumerable varieties of leaves and shoots. Some of the popular leaves are : leaves of the Chinch, Munga, Chakoora, Pipal, Phang, Kawakeni, Kajra, Khatna. Pakhri, Amara, Birbal flowers, Imli leaves, Kachnar and the young shoots of bamboos. These leaves and a host of others shoot out in different parts of the year. The Baiga housewife is thus able to maintain a sort of cycle all the year round and seldom fails to add leafy vegetables in the evening meals. The Forest Department does not impose any restrictions on the picking of leaves and thus aboriginals enjoy freedom of the forest to that extent.

A large variety of roots and tubers are collected in the forest. Baichandi is a kind of wild yam, which in its natural state is accounted poisonous, but after being steeped or boiled in water and cut into slices it forms the only food which a Brahman can eat on a fast day. Tikhur is a kind of wild arrowroot made from the roots of the wild curcuma angustifolia. Baiga likes the Kanhiakanda most. He would walk for miles in search of this tuber. Other popular roots are Kirchi, Kundru, Jalia, Jarungi, Sua and Saidu. Most of the Kandas are peeled and washed, then boiled and sometimes eaten even without salt or any spices. At times they are mixed with dal or made into curry. Baigas like wild *kutki*, immensely. It is a beautiful small grain called Siker which is nothing but the produce of old plants of Kutki. After a clearing has been abondoned, the plants of Kutki degenerate and in their third and fourth year the grain has become this Siker. It is much smaller than the fully cultivated gram, but also much sweeter, and with a nutty flavour about it, which is particularly delicious. Forsyth when first tasted it had remarked. "It made the best porridge I ever tasted. "*

Non-edible leaves

Tendu leaves (Diospyros melanoxylon) have assumed great commercial importance during the last 40 years. They are used in the manufacture of *biris* (Indian cigarette). The tree is found fairly well distributed in the forests of Madhya Pradesh but the chief localities are Bhandara, North Chanda, Jubbulpore, Bilaspur and Saugor Divisions. The leaves most prized are of large size, soft and pliable and of a slightly reddish colour. The season of collection largely depends upon local climatic conditions and upon the age of the plant. Usually new leaves come out towards the end of April and in older trees early in May. The plucking period lasts only about three weeks, as the new leaves, especially their veins, soon become too hard and tough to be useful. Collection is generally done by women and boys. The leaves are tied up into bundles of 100 and then put out to dry under the sun. The bundles when quite dry are baled in sacking and despatched to the *biri* manufacturing centres. Tendu leaves in ryotwari villages are the property of the tenants, but the right of collection from waste land and *minhai* (reserved forest in a ryotwari village) is given out on lease by the Deputy Commissioner.

Collection of *tendu* leaves is not an important source of income to the Baiga of the Mandla District and its surrounding areas as the growth of *tendu* trees is scanty in this region. Baigas in the Bilaspur,

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* **Forsyth : 'The Highlands of Central India', p. 341.**

Balaghat and Jabalpur divisions certainly participate in the collection, but since they live in the distant interior, their share is not important. In the Drug district *tendu* tree generally does not rise beyond two feet at the most, although it comes up year after year. The village cattle as they graze tear up the soil with their hoofs, exposing any *tendu* root that happens to be there. with the result that it sends up a shoot at the beginning of the hot weather to aid those that have come up before. Owing to continual grazing by buffaloes, these shoots have little chance of establishing themselves.

There are some leaves other than the *tendu* leaves which have economic uses. The trees which give the best fodder include Arjun, Babul, Bargad, Ber, Bija, Moyen, Palas and Pipal. Grazers may often be seen lopping or breaking the branches of trees in order to feed their cattle or goats. The leaves of teak, Mahul and Palas are collected green, dried under pressure, and spread under grass thatch. The Aonla and Dhaora leaves are collected when mature. They are then dried in the sun and ground into a coarse powder and used for tanning and dyeing. The leaves of Palas, Mahul, Bargad, Mahua, Sal and teak are also used in making umbrellas, plates, Donas and Chungis which are important necessities of Baiga family.

Tanning Materials

The fruit of harra tree (Terminalia Chabula), commercially known as myrabolan, is by far the most important tanning material in India; and Madhya Pradesh is fortunately one of the chief sources of its supply. The tree grows wild in many districts of the State, but Mandla, Raipur, Balaghat and Jabalpur give the greatest yield. It is found in abundance in the Shahpura, Dindori and parts of the Motinala Range of the Mandla Division, but in other tracts the trees are few and far between. In fact, many villages in Dindori tehsil derive their sole importance from the enormous *harra* forests. Harra is exported all over the world and Jabalpur No. 1 and Jabalpur No. 2 are grades well-known in Western Countries. The grades are named after Jabalpur not that Jabalpur district produces the largest quantity, but Jabalpur is the town in which the main collecting agencies work.

The Harra begins to ripen in the middle of October and falls from the tree in early December. In Balaghat district, however, it ripens slightly later in November. The collection work is over by the end of January or the middle of February latest. People, alongwith their women and children go out for collection early morning as *harra* is much eaten by cattle and wild animals. Harra fruit is very liable to suffer from rain or damp and if the fruit collected is unripe it is spread out to dry in the sun. It must be stored in a very dry place where there is least danger of getting moisted. In unripe state, the fruit is soft and green but when fully ripe it becomes hard and yellowish.

In ryotwari villages the *harra* in *minhai* areas is the Government property and is generally sold by auction alongwith the *harra* in the adjoining Government forests. The *harra* on occupied land in ryotwari villages, on the other hand, is the property of the ryots who are generally directed by the District Officer to sell their *harras* to the contractor who has taken the contract of the neighbouring Government forest.

The present system of auctioning the right of *harra* collection to private contractors does not work in the interest of the aboriginal. The contractor by purchasing the right of extraction of *harra* from Government forests and *minhai* areas, gets the right of buying *harra* collected by the villagers from occupied land in the ryotwari village. It amounts to a compulsion upon the villagers to sell their product to the Government nominated monopoly buyer and thus deprives the aboriginal seller from the advantages of competition among the buyers. Moreover, there is a complication with regard to the rates which contractors should pay for the *harras* collected on Government forests and those collected on occupied land. The contractor claims that the ryots have legally no ownership right in respect of the *harra* collected on Government or *minhai* forests except to a wage for collecting it. A ryot who collects *harra*, it is further argued, lumps together with the *harra* from his occupied land and that which he collects from Government or *minhai* forest. The remedy for the first difficulty is to empower the Divisional Forest Officer and the Deputy Commissioner to fix the rate to be paid for *harra* collected from both Government and *minhai* forests, and by rough calculation on the basis of the respective areas to fix a combined rate for all *harra* rather smaller than that which would be fixed for *harra* collected in occupied land but larger than that fixed for *harra* collected in the forests. Mention may be made of certain malpractices on the part of private forest contractors. Pressed by economic circumstances the aboriginal enters into an agreement (verbal of course) with the contractor that he will deliver a specified quantity of *harra* to the latter or his agent by a particular date and accepts an advance payment on the stipulation that in case the former fails to fulfil his part of the agreement the amount paid in advance will be converted into a regular debt plus a heavy penalty to be combined with the debt. If failure of *harra* crop or poor yield or illness in family or any urgent social duty prevents the aboriginal from collecting or delivering the agreed quantity by the promised date, he is pushed into the bonds of debt from which he is not able to come out for long. Besides, in weighment of the *harra* the contractor has the upperhand for tribals are illiterate and ignorant. Further, there is no spot supervision on the part of the Forest or Revenue Department. The contractor is, consequently, the sole authority with regard to the price and the manner and time of payment to be made to the aboriginal labourer. Presence of private contractors in the forest areas releases not only the forces of exploitation of the simple primitive but also creates many problems of culture-contact discussed elsewhere. It is with this view that the C.P. Industrial Survey Committee recommended for the Departmental working of the *harra* trees, which would ensure a fair deal to the aboriginal and in addition facilitate proper collection and grading of the *harra*.*

Since *Harra* is a commercial product and under the existing arrangements it is extracted by the private contractor, it is necessary to ensure the preservation and future regeneration of the *harra* trees, so that its supply may not be exhausted soon. Harra is a tree of the forest but in the close canopied forests which grow timber the tree produces a thin crown and little fruit. In the ryotwari villages such as in Mandla district, all foliage around harra trees have been cleared for *nistar*. Such trees have developed the round crowns which are essential to good seed production. But the life time of each tree is limited, and as no natural or artificial regeneration takes place in these cultivated or heavily grazed areas, it is only a matter of time for all these valuable trees to die off, and the country loses an important natural produce.† The forest contract rules provide that where a forest contract is for the extraction of *harra*, the forest contractor shall not in any way injure a tree in collecting the fruit.‡ But there is no provision for the replanting of *harra* trees in the Forest Manual. In order to obtain a regular supply of *harra* in future, steps should be taken so that the trees are regularly replaced in the areas where they grow naturally, and particularly, in the village grazing grounds. The villagers may be encouarged to grow them like mango orchards. The Revenue officials may be instructed to see that the work of replanting is properly carried out.

Among other tanning and dyeing materials may be mentioned the flowers of Dhawai, which are used for tanning leather, and for dyeing silk and leather red ; Kamela dye, which is obtained from a red powder on the fruit capsules and gives a bright orange colour. Other materials of minor importance are : Ghot, Bahera and Aonla.

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* Industrial Survey Committee Report, C.P. and Berar, Part II, Vol. 1, p. 8

† Report of the Provincial Industries Commtitee, C.P. & Berar, 1946, p. 22.

‡ Forest Manual, C. P. & Berar, Vol. II, p. 118.

Gums and Resins

Gums and resins are exuded from the stems or other parts of different species of trees, either natural or by wounding or blazing the tree. The forest rules provide that where a forest contract is for the extraction of gum, the contractor shall not injure or in any way wound any tree with a view to inducing the flow of the gum. Gums are used in preparing adhesive articles and in the manufacture of confectionery, medicine and other articles. Resins are inflammable material and are used in the preparation of incense and have many medicinal uses. Kulu tree is the most important source of gum from commercial point of view. But this species is not commonly found in the Baiga region. Damoh and Saugor divisions are important localities where Kulu gum yields growing revenue to the Government. The gum commonly known as Karaiya is used for sizing cloth, and in the manufacture of medicines and of confectionery. In Damoh and Saugor divisions the Kulu gum is at present collected departmentally. Each forest guards' beat is divided into coupes on which gum is collected according to a four-year or five-year tapping cycle. Exudation often continues for two years after blazing has stopped. Normally a person can blaze 100 trees in a day. The discharge of gum is greatest within the first 24 hours of blazing and continues for about two days. The first period of exudation is between October and November and the second falls between April and June. The labour is paid on piece wage system which again varies according to fluctuations in the price of the gum. Colour is the chief criterion of quality ; whiter the colour, finer the quality. After collection the gum is carefully sorted out, cleaned and graded. The collected stock is auctioned by the Forest Department.

Other gums and resins of less commercial value are exuded from a number of trees found throughout the Baiga region. Babul tree exudes gum naturally in the hot weather. Aboriginals collect it when sufficient quantity accumulates on the tree. Old trees yield more gum than young trees but the gum from young trees is of better quality. The babul gum is used in medicines, dyeing and cloth printing. Bija tree yields a bright red gum which is much used in medicines. Dhaora and Dikawali and Kurmudi and Palas also exude gums of different varieties which are used in calico printing, medicines, leather work and paper industry. Sal and Salai trees are important sources of resins. A resin known as Dammar is obtained by tapping Sal tree, while Salai tree yields a transparent gum aleo-resin which is used medicinally and is burnt as incense.

Baigas do not play any important role in the collection, grading or sale of gums and resins. Firstly the Kulu tree which yields commercially the most important gum does not occur in the Baiga region.

Other trees like Babul, Bija and Dhaora are not found in abundance, and besides, their gum is not in great demand due to its inferior quality. Secondly, the Forest Department has not taken any initiative in the matter so far. In the Mandla division where Baigas are concentrated, only timber and *harra* have attracted the attention of the Forest Department and the private contractors. Thirdly, whatever little quantity of gum and resin a Baiga collects on his own initiative finds its way into illicit market because the right of collecting gums and resins is invariably purchased by the private contractor at auctions. Since gum collection does not give regular employment, Baiga does it in a casual way. It is, therefore, not surprising that this illicitly collected gum and resin is often exchanged with a cheap commodity like salt. Lastly, Baiga being in isolation has not yet realised the commercial importance of gums and resins. It was not a source of income to him in the past. In his domestic life he uses gum for medicinal purposes and resins as incense in magic and worship. His socio-economic conditions have not made him realise the economic value of these products. This is why his first preference is for the fruits and roots which satisfy his primal necessities directly and immediately. The Forest Department will have to do a lot of spade work in organising the collection of gums and resins and for convincing the tribesmen of their trade value before Baiga himself comes forward in the field. The Department should collect gums, grade them and where necessary refine the produce before it reaches the market. The proposed arrangement will ensure a fair deal to all—the aboriginal, the trader and the final consumer.

Insect Products

Lac is a resinous exudation from the insect Laceifer Lacca which feeds on the sap of certain trees referred to as host trees. In Madhya Pradesh the most important lac host trees are Kusum, Palas, Ber and Ghont. Kusum tree is very common throughout the district of Raipur and the neighbouring areas. In Bhandara district Palas tree is the principal host tree, while Ghont trees occur in large numbers in the Saugor district. There are two broods of lac insects in the year and consequently two lac crops, one lasting generally from July to December and the second from January to June. The two annual crops of lac grown on different species of trees are also known by special names. Baisakhi, the summer crop of all species except Kusum. Katki the winter crop of all species except Kusum; Jethvi, the summer crop of Kusum and Kusumi, the winter crop of Kusum. While the Baisakhi or summer is usually bigger and better in quality than the Katki crop, with Kusum on the other hand the winter or Kusum crop is always better than the Jethvi or summer crop. Qualitatively differentiation is made by two names; lac collected before the insects have swarmed is known as Ari, while Phunki is lac from which the insects have not swarmed and is consequently clearer and purer than Ari.

In its primitive stage lac industry consisted in merely collecting the lac which grew wild and trusting to the insects overlooked by the collector to restock the trees. About twenty pounds could be procured annually from a tree by this method, provided any of the insects were left on it to breed. Capt. Forsyth describing the primitive method of lac collection wrote, "But just as often as not the improvident wild man will cut down the whole tree to save himself the trouble of climbing."* This method is still employed in some of the less important lac areas but is no longer permitted in a Government forest. The Forest Contract Rules provide that lac host trees shall be trimmed only to such extent as may be absolutely necessary for the propagation, cultivation and collection of lac. Further, at the last harvest of the contract at least one half of the total number of trees bearing the lac shall be left untouched.† Both the methods have been found unsatisfactory by experts. The first method results in the exhaustion of the tree, and weakening of the insect, while under the second method there will be considerable lopping off the trees and the consequent shortage of fresh shoots for the emerging larvae. To remove these defects primitive methods have been replaced by new ones in recent times according to which the lac insects are artificially transferred periodically to fresh trees. The twigs bearing the brood lac are collected from old trees and removed to fresh trees to which they are attached in such a way as to allow the insects to pass over to their new homes.

Lac is grown in Government Forests as well as in malguzari forests (situation has changed after the abolition of malguzari system) and a few tenants grow it on some trees on the bunds of their fields. Twigs bearing the lac incrustation are collected by the cultivators or aboriginal labourers and dried in the sun to facilitate the removal of the lac resin. The small cultivators sell it to the petty dealers who visit the villages for the purpose of buying lac. They dispose of their produce during the season; while slightly more resourceful cultivators store up lac for better prices. But the practice of storing lac for a long period is a harmful one because the lac deteriorates in quality, particularly when stored under bad conditions.

Lac is not an important forest product in the Baiga region except in some tracts of Bilaspur and Balaghat districts. But even here most of the aboriginals engaged in the collection and processing of lac are not

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* **Mandla District Gazetteer. p. 173.**

† **Forest Manual (C.P. & Berar), Vol. II, p. 118.**

A Baiga catching fish at Dharcutta.

Baigas. Kusum trees on which lac insects breed most are not found in large numbers in the Baiga region. Baigas live in dense forests and the trees growing in close canopy are not suitable for the growth of lac. On other species of trees like Palas, Ghont and Ber the insect does not exude finer quality of lac. Consequently lac available in the Baiga areas is of inferior quality, and fetches a lower price. But the greatest obstacle in the cultivation, collection and trading in lac in the Baiga tract is the Baiga's indifference. He does not attach any commercial importance to lac. Often he is seen bartering lac and resin for salt, beads or poison for his arrow. Due to his ignorance of market conditions, he is not able to appreciate the commercial value of the commodity.

For a primitive forest tribe like the Baiga, lac is still an ordinary forest product of little value, for it does not satisfy any of his wants. He is not aware that America imports the largest quantity of lac from India (Madhya Pradesh contributes 15 per cent of India's totals exports) and uses it in making varnishes, bleached shellac, gramophone records, adhesive materials, electrical goods, jewellery, toys and felt hats. The first step necessary for promoting lac cultivation in the Baiga region is to make Baiga conscious of its commercial importance and to assure him of a fair deal. Secondly, he needs training in the technique of cultivation and collection of lac. Further, the Forest Department should be made responsible for buying lac from the aboriginal directly so that he may not fritter away his stocks in exchanging cheap commodities like salt. At central places small cottage factories should be established for carrying out various semi-manufacturing processes.

Baigas enjoy a high reputation for collecting honey and wax. Being a forest tribe they have developed a special liking for honey (called 'ras' by the Baiga) and have devised various methods for scaring away bees from the beehive. Three kinds of bees are found in the forests of this State. Agia bee cannot be domesticated. It builds large combs on trees and rocks. Since it is a dangerous bee, the honey of Agia is collected on dark nights after smoking out the bees. The Mohtal is a smaller bee and builds small combs on tree branches. In this case the bee is simply driven off by shaking the branch. The Katia is still smaller than Mohtal It makes small combs in the hollows of trees and collects honey in small quantities, slightly sour in taste.

The prevalent method of honey collection is very crude, wasteful and renders honey impure. The bees are scared away, the hive captured and honey squeezed with hands, after which it is strained through a piece of cloth which is not always clean. The honey produced thus cannot rank very high in purity since the grub, the larvae, the pupa and dead bees if any, are also squeezed into the honey. Such impurities may range from six to eight per cent. The honey so obtained varies in quantity from a quarter or half a seers per comb of the ordinary bee to four to five seers per comb of the Agia bee. The price ranges between 1 to 2½ rupees per seer. Besides impurity, the reasons for low price are not far to seek. Low prices are, perhaps, due to the fact that the producer's cost of collection, his staying power and his knowledge of market conditions are virtually nil. The aboriginal consumes a part of it himself but the bulk he sells either direct to the consumers or local dealers and merchants who in their turn sell it in the neighouring market or export it. The right of collecting honey and wax in a Government forest is usually auctioned or sold on tender by the Divisional Forest Officer. Where a coupe has not been auctioned, particularly in the forest villages, the Baiga have a right to collect honey and wax. But in practice the Baiga do not enjoy this right due to the corruption of minor forest officials who seize all the fruits of the tribesmen's labour for their own profit. "The Baiga are generally afraid to offer honey for sale for fear some official will take it from them ; indeed they are afraid to go to the bazars at all, for fear their goods will be taken away and their labour impressed by some jack-in-office"*. The reason for the present state of affairs, therefore, lies not in Baiga's indifference towards honey collection. In fact when he gathers honey this *mantra* should be repeated at the foot of the tree where the hives are :—

"Mahadeo Parvati, when my pot is full, then into the seven seas and sixteen rivers I will make a river of honey to flow ".

Hunting

Hunting is a significant characteristic of the 'food gathering' economy of the Baiga. In olden days the tribesmen organised hunting regularly to meet their food requirements. Wild game was as much an important source of food supply as the collection of fruits and roots and a casual crop of coarse grains through shifting cultivation. In fact, most of the Baiga after spraying some seeds of Kutki devoted rest of their time to the hunting of game†. They had developed a remarkable skill for locating, chasing, aiming and killing the game. "Furnished with bow and arrow and a keen little axe hitched over the shoulder" wrote Forsyth about eighty years go, "the Baiga is the very model of a hill aborigine...... ekes out the fruits of the earth by an unwearying pursuit of game. Full of courage, and accustomed to depend on one another, they do not hesitate to attack any animal of the forest, including the tiger himself. They possess a most deadly poison wherewith they tip their little arrows of reed ; and the most ponderous beast seldom goes more than a mile, after

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*Elwin Op. cit., p. 80.

†Forsyth: Op.cit , p. 349

A front view of Baiga hunting party.

A back view of Baiga hunting party.

being pierced with one of these, without failing. Their bows are made entirely of the bamboos, 'string' and all ; they are very neat, and possess wonderful power for their size. A good shot among them will strike the crown of a hat at fifty yards ".*

The activity in which the hill aborigine had excelled so much, naturally became a source of tribal pride and strength. Baigas claimed superiority in hunting skill over other tribesmen and gave them lead in hunting raids. Their advice and guidance was accepted not only by their neighbours but by outsiders too who happened to penetrate into these deep forests. The hunting skill of high order thus raised the status of the Baiga tribe in the eyes of others. Baigas of the old order, no wonder, had woven many legends and myths to glorify their tribal superiority in hunting. Thus goes the story ; Mahadeo and Parvati once came to live in Nanga Baiga's jungle. After a time Parvati became pregnant, and went away to her own house. But she felt there lonely. At last she made a tiger and sent it to frighten Mahadeo in the hope that he would run to her. When the tiger approached Mahadeo, he was turned into a jungle-dog. The tiger-dog ran home and sat in Parvati's lap who again turned him into tiger and directed him towards Mahadeo. Then Mahadeo called Nanga Baiga and requested him to kill the tiger for him. Nanga Baiga went into the jungle and killed the tiger with his axe, and buried him under a banyan tree. But as he was digging, he cut one of the roots and the tiger drank milk from the root and returned to life. The tiger again went to trouble Mahadeo. On being requested again by Mahadeo to kill the tiger, Nanga Baiga went to the jungle and raised his axe to hit the tiger. But the tiger lifted up his paw and said, "Whenever I catch men, goats, cattle, chickens in a village, all people will call on you to help them. You won't get gold or silver—that is for the Hindus. But wherever you do your magic in a village or forest, there I will never come, and the people will trust you and will give you enough for your livelihood. " Instead of killing the tiger for Mahadeo, Nanga Baiga thought it better to enter into a pact with the tiger for by that he would always have enough to drink at least.

One day soon after this pact the tiger killed a Gond. Baiga was called to decide through his magic whether the man was killed on account of his sin or the tiger had transgressed the boundary (Mero) drawn by Baiga. Baiga performed his magic (Supa, Tuma and images of sin and banaspati) and proclaimed that the deceased had broken a law of the tribe and so he had been standing on *papi-dharti* (Sin) and the tiger had been able to kill him. Nanga Baiga drove four iron nails in four trees in four directions and said "O Dharti Mata, O Banaspati, today I Nanga Baiga have fixed the boundary of this village. I Nanga Baiga, make it free from every kind of tiger". From that day Nanga Baiga has been lord of all wild animals—the true Pashupati.* The myth gives him confidence to face a tiger, he walks upto a wounded pig armed with only a bow and arrow, and gets severely wounded for his pains, and many instances are on record of a Baiga rescuing a companion from panthers and tigers, armed with only a club or axe.

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*Forsyth: Op. cit., p. 301

However as a result of change in environment and occupation Baiga does not show the old vigour and courage in hunting. From a valiant chaser of ferocious animals he has been made a plough cultivator. Permanent settlement in the villages has narrowed down the area of hunting. New villages inhabited by other tribesmen have come into existence—which fact is again responsible for the increasing claims over the same fauna. Under the present shooting rules Baiga cannot hunt everywhere and everything. Corrupt officials' terror has developed a fear-complex in him. If he goes out on hunting even within the game laws he does not go now in a spirit of pride and privilege bestowed by the myth of Pashupati. He moves in a stealthy manner, feeling that he is being chased by the forest guard or the police constable. One can easily imagine as to how a Shikari will behave when he has the feeling of himself being chased by a more ferocious creature than he is aiming at. Besides, the alien shikaries and government officials prostitute Baiga's hunting skill for their pleasure. It is a common practice among these outsiders to hire Baigas on few chips for locating and chasing the game for days together. Baigas have been treated as wild, low-caste and uncivilised people. This has left a demoralising effect upon the aboriginal. As a result, he now feels that the right of hunting has gone over to the civilised and that he is expected only to help them in killing the game. From Pashupati he has become a drum beater for others. What a change ! One can see its effect on a Baiga's face especially when he is asked to follow an 'alien' shikari in a hunting raid.

But the significance of hunting has not disappeared from Baiga's life altogether. Skill, vigour, myth and the feeling of tribal superiority are still there, though in their decadent form. The Baiga are still the most skilled hunter among the tribesmen of the region. Baiga has not lost his reputation as a tenacious chaser and an accurate marksman. Even now Baigas seldom miss any opportunity of hunting. In most of the intervals between his agricultural operations, a Baiga is found roaming in the forest in search of the game. Even the children can be seen

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* **Elwin : Op. cit. pp. 325-327.**

A Baiga Youth aiming the Arrow.

fixing traps and snares for small game and birds. Baiga manages a meat diet at least once a fortnight and thus makes up, to some extent, the nutritional deficiency of otherwise predominantly cereal diet. But it may be remembered that hunting is not a source of money income to a Baiga. He does not sell either meat or skin in the market. In fact, there is no ready demand for meat in the nearby places nor is the Baiga inclined to dispose of the fruit of his hard labour. The surplus meat is distributed among those who helped in the hunt or it is dried and preserved for the future use.

Baiga's game ranges from tiger to mouse. He may not eat everything that he kills, but his arrow spares very few species. At times it is only the thrill of killing which prompts him to lift his axe or release the arrow. But it is a taboo to eat the tiger and bear. Tiger's fat is extracted and used for lamps and massage. Monkeys are generally not killed and the Binjawar and Muria do not kill Gaur. A Baiga would not aim at sparrows, owls, parrots, kites, vultures and cranes. Different considerations work behind these taboos. Tiger is a sacred animal called Baghesurpat and is killed only when it begins to attack men or animals in the village. Though killed, its flesh is not eaten by the Baiga. Bear is considered a nasty and dirty animal. Its flesh is disliked by them. Monkeys are spared partly because they are revered by Hindus and partly because their flesh smells very badly. Sparrows and parrots invoke Baiga's compassion and they are spared as they are pleasing to eyes. Owls, vultures, and kites eat rotten meat and dirty things. Baigas have an abhorrence for them.

Though the old order has passed and hunting has declined in its importance, certain rituals and ceremonies connected with hunting have survived. According to Baiga beliefs Maswasi is the goddess of the hunt. Raktipurbi, Alopurbi, Sattibhavani and Kolin Sattibhavani like Maswasi live in his bows and arrows. Before going to the hunt Baiga promises these dieties a coconut or a cock if he is successful and he says this *mantra* over his bow and arrow. On the repetition of this *mantra*, it is believed, the goddess goes with the hunter, and drives away all the carnivora, leaving only deer and birds.

O Raktipurbi ! O Alopurbi ! O Satubhavani ! O Kolin Sattibhavani ! I am going to the thick jungle. Turn all the tigers and bears into stone. Turn the thorns into wax. Turn the snakes into sticks. Bring out the deer and make it stand before me.*

Baiga claims special intimacy between himself and all the wild animals. Gunia is believed to control even tigers with the power of their magic. They can tame the tiger, drive him away and shut his mouth with iron nails. Such stories are constantly repeated and firmly believed by aboriginals. Elwin along with a Baiga once came across a very large tiger sitting in the middle of the road. He was unarmed and the tiger began to walk towards them. But the Baiga was not at all put out. He began to mutter some incantations, and after a few minutes the tiger yawned lazily, and strolled away into the jungle. The Baiga claimed entire credit for its departure. When a tiger or leopard enters fields and kills men or cattle, Baiga is required to repair the village boundary which the tiger is supposed to have broken. The Gunia offers coconut and Sarai gum and then drives nail into the wood. He recites *mantra* bidding all the tigers to run away to another country. Baiga magician's most dangerous duty is that of laying the spirit of a man who has been killed by a tiger. He has to proceed to the spot where the death occurred—which is probably still frequented by the tiger-with various articles, such as fowls and rice, which are offered to the manes. A pantomine of the tragedy is then enacted by the Baiga, who assumes the attitude of a tiger, springs on his prey, and devours a mouthful of the blood stained earth. Eight days are allowed to pass, and should not the Baiga in the interval, be himself carried off by the tiger, the spirit is held to be effectually laid, and the people again resort to the jungles. The theory rests on the superstition prevalent throughout these hills that the ghost of the victim, unless charmed to rest, rides on the head of tiger, and incites him to further deeds of blood, rendering him also secure from harm by his preternatural watchfulness.

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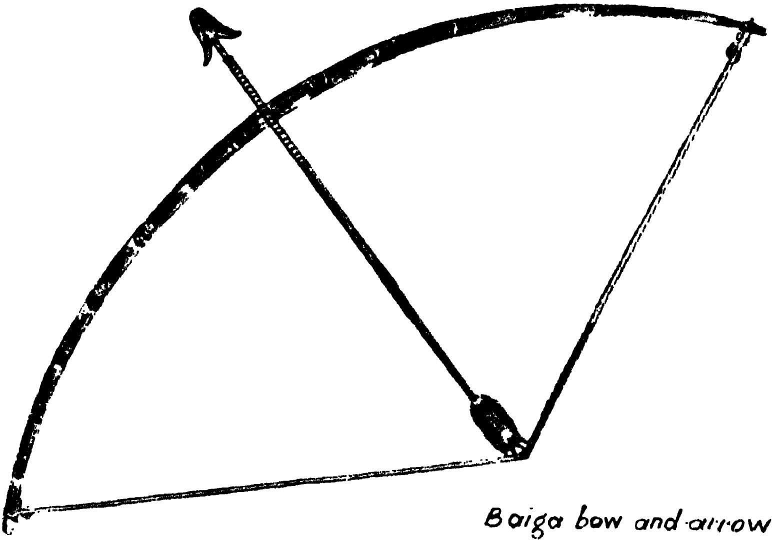
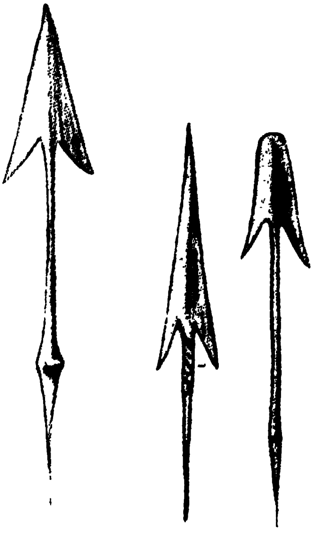
* Elwin : Op. Cit. p. 85.

Since Baiga is a primitive hunter, his weapons are crude and simple. Although he uses iron, yet most of his requirements are supplied by the local blacksmith called Agaria. Very few among Baigas possess gun because their means are limited and they are ignorant of its use. For all types of games both 'small' and 'big' they use spears, and bows and arrows. There are two kinds of spears—*Sang and Barchi.* The whole spear if made of iron, is called Sang, while a spearhead attached to a bamboo shaft is known as Barchi. The latter may have a single bladed head or a three-bladed head. The spears are kept quite sharp and they are not allowed to rust. The services of the Agaria are availed whenever the spears get blunted or they are sharpened at home. When not used, a little oil or animal fat is applied to the blades and covered with cloth wrappings. Spears tucked up in the roof is a common sight in a Baiga home. Afraid of the game laws a Baiga will ordinarily try to hide it; but a little intimacy makes him display the weapon with vigour and pride. He then opens the inexhaustible fund of stories of adventurous dashes with the spear.

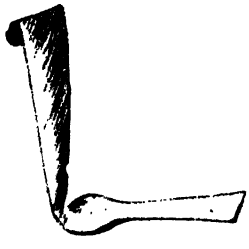
BOW & ARROW AND SPEAR



Baiga bow and arrow



Arrow-heads



Meat-cutter

Spear

The Baiga *bow* is an extremely simple instrument. In length it is generally about four feet. The stave is made of *dhamin* wood or bamboo of high flexibility. For string bamboo or sinews are used. Notches are made at both the ends of the stave into which the stops of the string are tied by chord or leather thongs. Since the middle part of the string bears the strain it is made stronger by Sambhar or Hiran sinew. Sometimes a binding of Kosa thread is given to stave also. Every male adult has his own bow, sometimes a set of two or three, children may also have real bows to kill game or dummy bows for training.

The *arrow* is made of straight thin bamboo, reed or Dhamin wood. The arrow head is tied with Kosa or sinew and feathers of any bird are attached at the end in order to give speed and straight dash to the arrow. They possess a most deadly poison wherewith they tip their little arrows of reed (called *bisteer*). The flesh is discoloured and spoilt for some distance round the wound. This is cut out, and the rest of the carcass is held to be wholesome food. These poisoned arrows are remarkably similar to those used by the Bushmen of South Africa. In one of their *mantras* the Baiga name the following kinds of arrows : Saktiban, Dhanusban, Agniban, Chirriban, Bittaban, Andriban, Chakarban and Sabdavedhiban.

Baigas do not attach any religious sanctity to their bow and arrow. But certainly they become serious when they lift the bow thinking that Baigas are traditional hunters and that bow and arrow are the privileged possessions of their tribe. If their confidence is won, they start describing their achievements with pride and confidence. A Baiga youth armed with bow and arrow looks his character—monarch of all that he surveys, a true Pashupati wielding sovereign power over the wild. But the modern game laws have undermined Baiga's courage and vitality. Now he does not lift up his bow and arrow in a spirit of freedom and tribal pride. Little game is now left even in the remotest parts like the Baiga Chak. The extension of plough-land and roads has scared away the wild animals. Crowded in small areas, the animals have begun to exhaust themselves. Many species have perished in their flights or in their new abodes. But the share of the restrictions on game is the greatest. The aboriginal feels the 'Shiver of law' first and the thrill of the game afterwards.

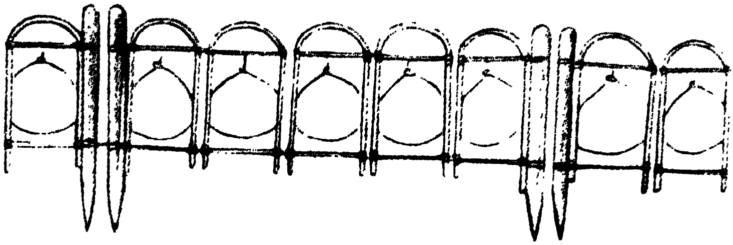
It is, therefore, not surprising that the present day Baiga uses traps more than weapons for killing animals. Game laws permit them to protect their crops against the attacks of animals. Traps known as Suri are placed around the bewar or cultivated fields. A number of long knives and spears are fixed in a place over which animals are likely to jump. A deep ditch is dug just ahead of the spears and it is covered with bamboo sticks and leaves to give it an appearance of a level ground. Similarly green leavas are attached to the spears giving them a look of green tree to attract the animal. The height of the spears, depth of the ditch and the size of aperture in the fencing are so accurately adjusted to the body, habit and probable jump of the animal that it seldom escapes the trap. The whole arrangement speaks of Baiga's knowledge of wild animals and the routes they follow.

The Dang-phanda is a trap of more elaborate type. It is fixed not for protecting the crops but for catching the animal. A small ditch is made under a tree of long branches. The ditch is covered with a triangular bamboo piece which is connected with the branch of the tree bent down to the ground. A noose is arranged round the whole and the piece of bamboo fixed in place with a stick. Some food is spread about to attract the animal. The trap is now ready. When any small animal happens to break the stick while roaming under the tree, its foot is caught in the noose, and the branch of the tree freed of the string raises the poor creature above the ground.

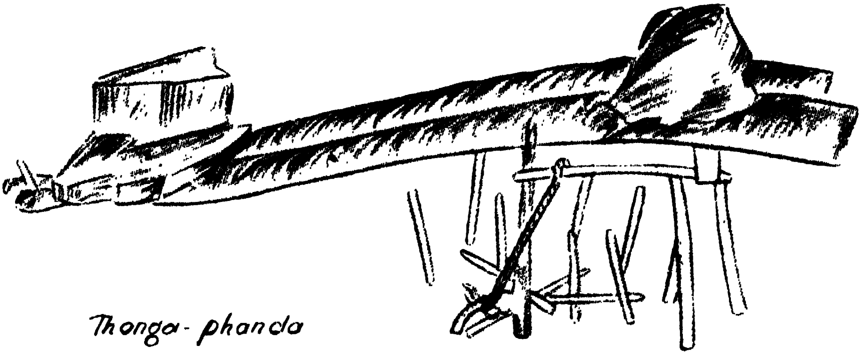
Another trap to catch hare is the Phatki-phanda. An automatic noose is fixed over the door of a bamboo cage. Bait is placed inside the Phanda and when the hare pushes through the noose to reach the bait, the Phanda tightens and the animal falls into the trap. Another device used to catch small animals is the Thonga-phanda. A rough cage is raised to support two heavy logs made still heavier with stones. A string is attached to the supporters and food is placed on bamboo sticks placed under the logs. As the animal walks on these sticks to eat the food, they give way pulling out the support of the logs. The entire weight of logs and stones consequently falls on the animal all of a sudden dashing it to the ground. There are several types of other traps with local variations important among them are : Daya-phanda, Khujji-phanda and Choph.

Baiga boys are very much after birds and rats. One can see a number of traps and snares fixed around the village and intently watched by the funny chaps. The Dabka-phanda is a small rectangular box in which a weighty wooden plank is so fixed that as soon as the rat goes on the plaited bamboo piece on which food is spread and which supports the weighty wood it gives way and the rat is killed under the weight of the wood. There are other types of rat-traps varying from stone weight to complicated self-acting traps. These traps and snares are in no way a speciality of the Baiga. Other tribesmen like the Gonds, Marias of Bastar, Bheels of Nimar tract and Khonds and Saoras of the Eastern region also use them with some changes of minor importance.

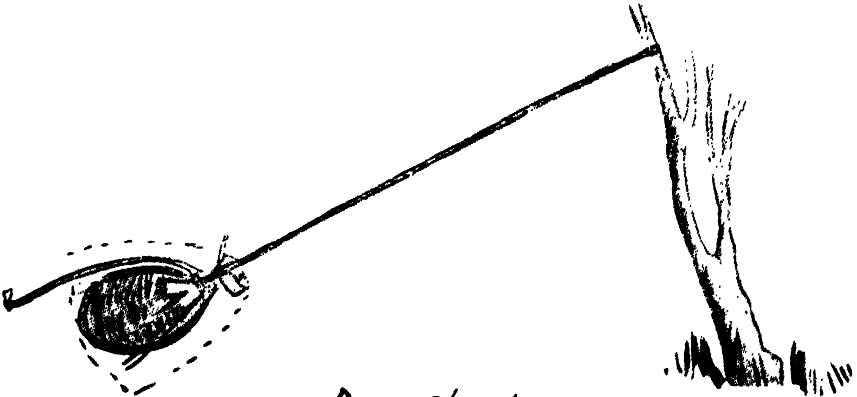
TRAPS FOR ANIMALS



Khujji - phanda



Thonga - phanda



Dang - phanda

Baiga's technique of hunting is an object of envy by other tribesmen. Since ages he has been a reputed hunter. Through frequent roaming in the forest he has acquainted himself with every rock, valley, stream and pool. He is as much familiar with the animals' usual routes as with his village paths. Knowledge of animals' habits enables him to guess their probable resting places or the frequently visited spots. Himself subsisting on a half-wild diet, namely leaves, roots and tubers. Baiga is sturdy and agile like an antelop or panther. The mere sight of a wild animal lights up a spark in him—he jumps up with remarkable vigour and chases the animal like a shikari dog. He can run for miles without losing breath. Without food and water he would pursue the game relentlessly. The wild chasing a wild—climbing rocks, crossing valleys, avoiding tall trees and trampling thorns, creeping, hiding and moving with pussy-foot, he reaches close to his prey and releases the never-missing poisonous arrow at the animal which must fall down instantaneously or at the most after going for a mile or so.

Ritual-hunts are not organised by the Baiga these days. But they cooperate with one another in hunting. Except in small game or accidental chasing, Baigas always go out together for hunting. The elders who are (not unoften) wiser and experienced decide the direction and the forest to which the hunting party should go. Different groups are assigned their territory and posted at their respective places. Once the animal is spotted, all combine instinctively for chasing and harassing it. Even boys do their job of howling and beating. All act in such a dramatic manner that the animal is soon over powered. Every one is anxious to become hero of the day. When the animal is killed the whole party goes wild in victory and joy. The kill is skinned—a part is roasted and eaten jointly on the spot. The remaining portion is shared among the participants of the raid. If a family was not able to send its member to join the hunting party or if there was someone invalid, he too is given a share of the kill. The distribution of the kill is so smooth and amicable that quarrels are rare and laughed at. If someone had laboured more than others, he may be given a slightly bigger share just as a reward and not as a matter of right. Nobody grudges the share of non-participants. The whole job from chasing to the sharing of the kill is a remarkable example of communal approach of the aborigine to one of their most important economic activity. Each one does his maximum in hunting and receives almost an equal share in the kill. By sparing a share for the unrepresented family or the invalid, the principle is further extended to "from each according to his capacity and to each according to his need". The whole system—it is surprising to note—works without the aid or interference of any external authority. There is no tribal leadership or organised institution to enforce the system. All agree to and work spontaneously even without being conscious of the cooperative element in their productive activity.

Game Laws and their enforcement

Game Laws framed under the Game Act regulate shooting in Government forests. The Conservator of Forests of the Circle prepares every year in October a list of forests which are closed to the public generally for hunting, shooting, netting or setting traps and snares. The list specifies those forests which are closed absolutely for shooting and in which shooting is permitted on certain conditions. After the publication of the said list, the forests of each Division are divided off into convenient shooting blocks by the Deputy Commissioner and Divisional Forest Officer with the approval of the Conservator of the Circle. Shooting permits—District and Block permits—are issued by the Divisional Forest Officer on payment of Rs. 1/- a day subject to a minimum of Rs. 10 - and a maximum of Rs. 25/- per mensem. Sportsman is also required to be in possession of Big Game shooting licences under the Game Act. Except carnivora, only limited head of game is allowed to be killed in any shooting block in any one year. On this limit being reached, the block is closed for the remainder of the season. No person is permitted to shoot in any one year ending on 31st October in the Government Forests more than one wild buffalo, one bison, three Barasingas, four Sambhars and four Chitals. The duration of a permit is determined by the demand for shooting blocks. The forest authorities maintain a list of the game and edible birds which alone can be killed. A close season is fixed for the birds and animals. The destruction of any bird or animal during the close season fixed for such bird or animal is prohibited.* In some forests, where deer or wild cattle have become a pest special licenses are given to individuals for their destruction. Wild pigs are everywhere regarded as a pest and forest subordinates are encouraged to organise pig beats by the local villagers.

As far as the provisions of the law are concerned there is nothing extra-ordinary about them as to single out this State in the whole country. But all is not well with their enforcement. The subordinate staff of the Forest, Police and Revenue Departments meddle with the rules partly prompted by evil intentions and partly due to their misinterpretation of the rules. In many villages Baigas complained that they were held guilty and consequently harassed for killing a small animal not forbidden by law. Forest guards and police constables seize the fruit of their labour on the false pretext of an illegal act. Elwin and Grigson also record that unscrupulous officers have a tendency to extort something

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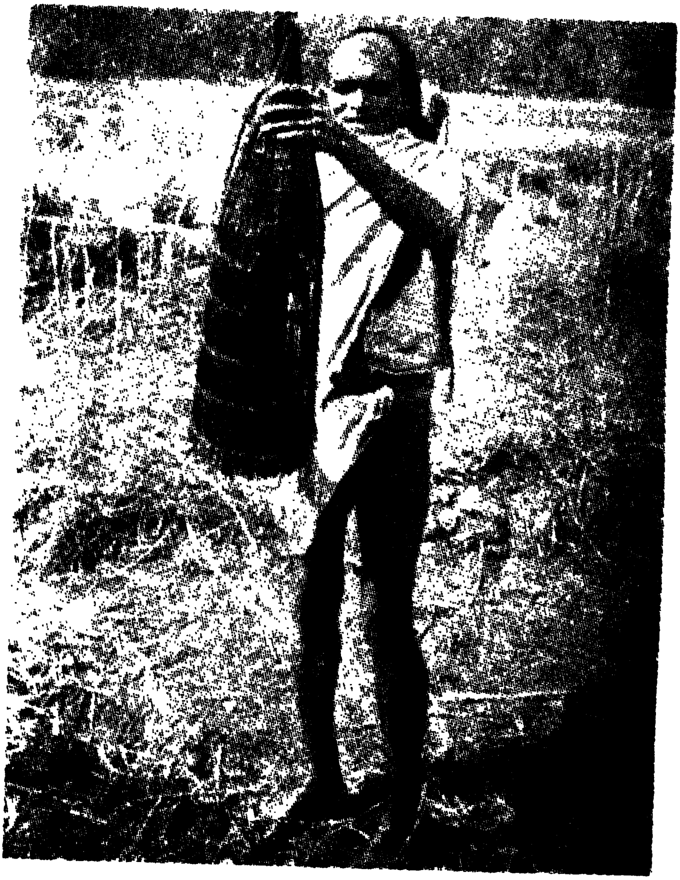
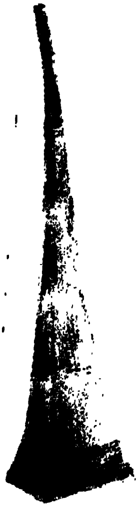
*Forest Manual Vol. II Pp. 39-46.

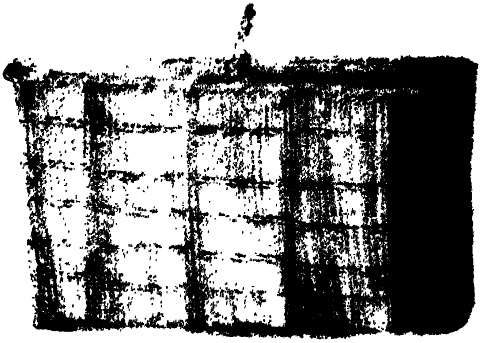


A Baiga of Dharkutta demonstrating a fish trap.

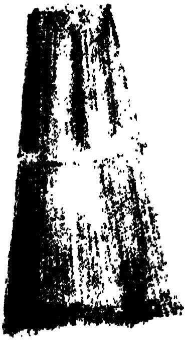
Fish - Traps



Bissera - trap



Jhumar fish - trap



Chhapa plunge - trap

Gira

from the aborignal by misrepresenting his trapping or hunting even of unprotected species as breaches of game laws.* The law abiding simple Baiga is easily terrified by Government officials who declare keeping of ordinary weapons like spears, bows and arrows as an offence. Three factors are responsible for this state of affairs : aboriginal's ignorance regarding game laws in force, lack of information and training on the part of the petty Government employees and corruption among the subordinate officials of the Forest, Police, Excise and Revenue Departments.

The aboriginal have a strong complaint against the modern game laws and the manner of their enforcement. Game laws, they say, have curtailed their freedom to shoot whatever and whenever they like. The restrictions imposed by the law and those inherent in the economic condition of the primitives, have pressed hard on the aboriginal. Game laws have caused a change in the contents of their diet which is becoming predominantly cereal. The Baiga resent that shooting rules have deprived them of the vital source of diet. "The Baiga", writes Elwin, "would have resented the new regulations less had they not seen anyone who could afford a licence coming into their territory to shoot for pleasure what they need for food. For a pittance they are now forced to beat towards inexpert town-bred marksmen the game which once they were free to hunt themselves."† The laws have given a blow to Baiga's sense of superiority as hunter. There is now little chance for him to demonstrate his skill with freedom and self-respect. Visits by outsiders who hire Baigas for beating and who treat them as of low-caste, further lower the prestige of the aborigine. Hunting once a privilege of the Baiga has now become a cause of degradation, due to present game laws. A Baiga cannot afford to pay licence fees. But shoot he must though not so often and so freely as before. Like a thief, avoiding the eyes of the forest guard, he kills a small animal and brings it to the village stealthily. A great demoralisation of the aboriginal who was pictured some 80 years ago a 'truthful and honest almost to a fault... serious crime among them was almost unheard of'.‡

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* **Elwin : Loss of Nerve; Pp. 17-18.**
Grigson : 'The Aboriginal Problem in C.P. and Berar', p. 346

† **Elwin : Loss of Nerve, p. 18.**

‡ **Forsyth: Op. Cit. p 302.**

CHAPTER VII

TRIBAL HANDICRAFTS

Baiga's system of production is a typical example of production for direct consumption. Most of the products of aboriginal's handicrafts are consumed by the producer and his family. Consequently there is a direct relationship between aboriginal's productive activities and his wants. The kind, volume and the time of production are, therefore, largely determined by the pattern and the intensity of Baiga's wants rather than by the demand schedule of the general market. Generally speaking, Baiga produces what and as much he needs for himself and not what others need. For example, he prepares a basket when the old one is to be replaced by the new; he extracts oil from *ramtila* seeds with the help of 'petla' when his stock of oil is exhausted; a new fishing net is woven only when the previous one shows holes. Since Baiga produces for home consumption, market fluctuation do not generally affect his household crafts. The rise in oil prices does not induce him to extract more oil for selling nor does he weave additional nets for reaping profits. Since domestic demand is the real incentive behind tribal handicrafts a vacuum exists between market conditions and the crafts. In recent times some of his handicrafts, like basketry and collection of forest produce, have been influenced by external factors. But on the whole, the basic structure of Baiga's handicrafts still rests on self-sufficiency. His handicrafts are interwoven with the social life of the family, its standard of living, man-power and the degree of adaptation with natural environment of the village. Since most of these factors are not subject to rapid changes, Baiga has established an equilibrium between himself and his handicrafts. This gives an impression to the outsider that the Baiga handicrafts are static and crude. The fact, however, is that Baiga's pattern of life which propells his handicrafts has remained static since long. The self-sufficiency basis has acted as a non-conductor between his handicrafts and the technological advancement made by others. The causes of this stagnation lie neither in the poor intelligence of the Baiga nor in the non-availability of natural resources but in the very role which the handicrafts play in Baiga's economic life. Their purpose is to meet Baiga's requirements and not the market demand. Consequently these handicrafts are not what technical progress could make them, but what Baigas want them to be.

Utilisation of local raw materials

Unlike the modern man, Baiga has a limited ambition of conquering nature. The pattern of his life is not the result of clash with and victory over nature but of a harmonious adaptation with natural surroundings. Ordinarily a real Baiga does not consume what nature does not offer him nearby, except salt and cloth. Most of his handicrafts, therefore, utilise raw materials locally available without much difficulty. For basketry and mat-making bamboo grooves are ever green in the neighbourhood, for bows and arrows bamboo, reed, skin, locally smelt iron, and poisonous matters are available at hand, for nets and traps wild creepers and fibrous plants or locally grown hemp provide him with necessary materials. It is notable that unlike the urban crafts Baiga handicrafts do not depend for the supply of raw materials on modern factories and transport or the complex agency of the middlemen. Dependence on the local supply of raw materials delimits the scope of handicrafts in respect of variety and volume of production; but at the same time it reduces those external influences which render present day artisan's position unstable and unremunerative. As raw materials are procured locally through personal labour their cost remains stable which in its turn keeps the cost of production of handicraft articles stable. Besides, the Baiga craftsman has an opportunity of selecting his raw materials. It enables him to control the quality of his goods. The practice of utilising local resources has a wider effect on employment situation in the aboriginal villages. A close observation will reveal that Baiga is not so much dependent on agriculture as the cultivators in the plains. On an average the former derives 44.8 per cent of his income from forest work. His employment is more diversified. Therefore he is less exposed to vagaries of agriculture. It is true that under this arrangement the oppoitunities of specialisation and technical progress are less; but the loss is compensated to some extent by the advantages of self-sufficiency, greater stability and increased volume of employment.

A family job

Baiga handicrafts provide job for the whole family. The aged, children and women all join hands with the adult worker. The wife and husband together operate the *petla* for extracting oil. The children hold the oil-receiving pot in a playful spirit. The old who are unable to do arduous work in the forest engage themselves in weaving nets and traps or in making baskets and *supa*. Women are well adept in the art of preservation of wild roots and tubers, in preparing articles of decoration and clay digging. In fact a Baiga home has the appearance of a small workshop in which every member of the family is doing some or the other work according to his or her capacity and aptitude. In a family atmosphere like this there is hardly any scope for labour unrest—a common feature of modern factory life. Since the worker is not divorced from ownership of the fruits of his labour, everybody works instinctively to the best of his capacity. The intensity and hours of work, rest intervals and co-ordination of work adjust themselves in a natural manner and not through strikes and lockouts as is the case with big factories. The absence of hired labour in Baiga crafts should not, however, be interpreted as restriction of work to the family. Whenever the intensity of a craft is high or the craft requires labour of many, Baiga families cooperate on reciprocal basis. For example, if bamboos are to be felled for basketry two or three families will join hands. In clay digging women cooperate. But in none of these processes the participants are paid wages either in kind or cash. In fact, it is a partnership rather than a paid work. Reciprocity and not wages, is the basis of such cooperation. Since all the factors of production are owned by the worker himself the distribution aspect of Baiga industries is simple. The craft products need not be distributed among the suppliers of various factors of production. The whole family, which is one unit, enjoys the fruits of its labour in an atmosphere of harmony. There is another interesting feature of Baiga's cottage industries. A Baiga boy automatically gets training in different handicrafts. By the time he attains adolescence he becomes expert of his crafts. He is not required to undergo regular schooling or training. Just as he learns to eat, a Baiga boy learns to weave net, operate the *petla*, make baskets, balance the bow and release the arrow.

Small Capital

Since satisfaction of family wants is the main purpose of the Baiga craft the scale of production is very small. The crafts, therefore, do not require any large amount of capital investment. For example, about five rupees for blades and knives, and a couple of rupees for bamboos—is all that is required for the bamboo work. Similarly a few poles, small planks, a small basket and an earthen pot and two slabs of stone complete the equipment of an indigenous apparatus of oil extraction. In making bows and arrows, and nets and traps Baiga does not invest much capital as most of the raw material is available free of cost from the forest.

Baiga's tools and implements are extremely simple and cheap. Most of them are made by Baiga himself out of local raw materials except the iron tools which he obtains from the local blacksmith known as Agaria. Secondly, since the tools are simple and home-made, expenditure on their repair and maintenance is not heavy. A Baiga can repair his bow and arrow; he can mend his net; and he can sharpen his axe and knife if they are not very much blunted. Thirdly, expenditure on replacements and renewals is not large. The craftsman need not create any reserve for this purpose. Thus the amount of capital required for making, maintaining and replacing tools is very small. In fact, the proportion of labour to capital is sufficiently high. Roughly the amount may not exceed rupees five per adult worker. The small capital investment has produced some important results. The overhead charges are low in aboriginal crafts. Secondly, labour can be switched from one job to another without much difficulty. Thirdly, low interest charges enable the craftsman to produce at a lower cost. The entire arrangement suits the aboriginal economy. The Baiga does not reap profit by selling his product in the market. Naturally he cannot afford the high over-head and interest charges. But the adverse effects of the low proportion of capital investment on the technique of Baiga's crafts need not be overlooked. Baiga has lagged behind other artisans in the technique of production. His tools are crude, methods arduous, efficiency low and the productivity not in proportion to the amount of labour which he puts in. He is not able to satisfy even his family wants. For example. the indigenous method of oil pressing does not produce sufficient quantity of oil for the family. Similarly he has to undergo a hard trial in climbing trees and scaring away the bees for honey collection. The method of taking out honey by squeezing renders it impure.

Integration with agriculture

Baiga does not carry on his handicrafts continuously and throughout the year. Most of the crafts are seasonal and irregular. The time and season of work depends on nature's supply of raw materials, spare time, intensity of forest work and the actual need of an article for consumption. In a few cases the craft is operated in response to the market demand. Honey, herbs and roots are collected when their season has started. Ropes, strings, and cots and *machais* are prepared when *mohlain's* (creeper) fibre has ripened. A Baiga is seen weaving his nets and traps during the intervals between sowing and weeding ; and harvesting and the next sowing. He prepares his bows and arrows when the hunting season has set in. But oil pressing, *patri* and *dona* (leaf plates and cups) making, food collection and preservation are controlled by the actual need as and when felt by the family. The aboriginal crafts are thus harmoniously integrated with cultivation and forest work on the one hand, and family requirements on the other. Baiga engages himself in handicrafts when he is free from agricultural operations and then reverts to the collection of raw materials. The cycle of employment has been so wisely adjusted in respect of time, intensity of work and coordination that not only the jerks of change are avoided, an equilibrium is also maintained in different types of employments. Given adequate control over the flora and fauna of the region, a Baiga will seldom be found under-employed like the cultivator of the plains. In olden days Baigas were free to cut forest for axe cultivation ; agriculture did not dominate their lives to such an extent. Food collection, hunting and fishing, and the allied handicrafts occupied their time more than agriculture. In recent years with the introduction of plough cultivation and the curtailment of 'freedom of forest' the emphasis has shifted to cultivation proper. However, the basic integration of crafts with agriculture and forest work can still be seen in comparatively more isolated villages. Baigas are conscious of the importance of this arrangement. For wherever they have been deprived of the supply of raw materials for their crafts by the forest laws, they complain of under-employment. Similarly where compulsory forest work has interfered with their usual time table they grumble against the forest administration. In many cases culture-contact and the forest laws have reduced Baigas' hunting and food collection activities.

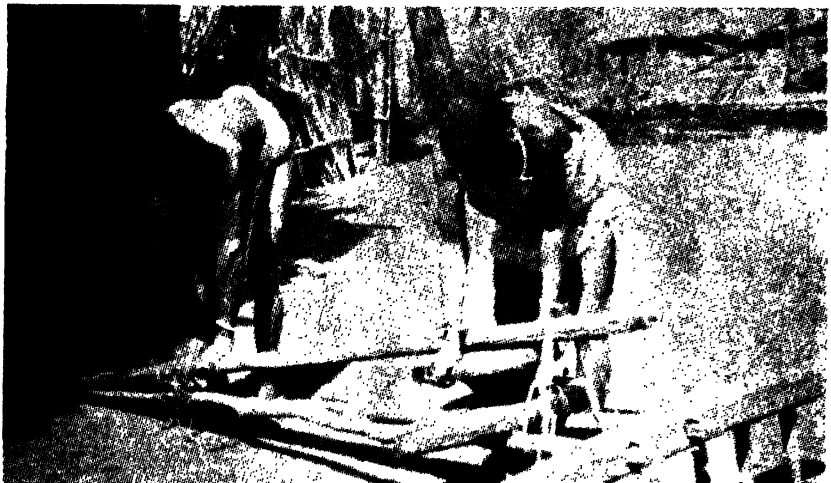
The main features of Baiga's handicrafts may now be recapitulated in a summary form. The Baiga craftsman mainly produces for home consumption, and not for the market. He utilises local raw materials in his handicrafts. Therefore he does not depend upon external sources. The aboriginal handicraft is a family job in which one and all have the opportunity of contributing their own share of work. The amount of capital invested in these crafts is definitely smaller than the units of labour. Therefore such crafts have all the advantages of labour—intensive industry. Technologically the standard of Baiga crafts is not very high, but they are in complete harmony with the agricultural operations and forest work of the Baiga tribe.

SOME ABORIGINAL CRAFTS

Basketry

Basketry is very popular among the Baiga. A Baiga house is studded with baskets and bamboo boxes of different patterns, shapes and sizes. Baskets are used for fishing, winnowing, food collection, cooking and washing, marketing, weighing, rituals and worship. Basket making is an easy job for the Baiga. The raw material is readily available in the nearby forest or on the river bank. The equipment required for the craft is inexpensive. A big knife and a blunt spear-head costing not more than three rupees, are the only tools required by the craftsman. They can be purchased from the village blacksmith known as Agaria. The handicraft does not require any extraordinary skill or long training. It can be carried intermittently and in any part of the year.

Baigas of Silpuri village making baskets.



Baiga wife and husband operating the Petla in Jhilang village.

The bamboos grow all over the Baiga land. But they are found in more abundance in the basins of Nerbudda, Banjar, Khamer, Burner and Son. Only two species of bamboos occur, of which that known locally as Bans (Dendrocalonues strictus) is by far the more important. It is exceedingly useful for all purposes and is exported in large quantities. A larger species known as Kattang bans or thorny bamboo (Bambusa arudinacea) are also found, though not in great quantities. on the banks of Deo, Son and Wainganga rivers. The Baiga count the age of their oldest men by the number of Kattang crops they have eaten. The most common method of exploitation of bamboos is by sales on rated passes at fixed rates per hundred, the rates varying according to the quality of bamboos and the accessibility of coupes. In the Balaghat area, however, sales are on what is known as the monopoly-royalty system. A fixed rate per hundred is prescribed for a coupe, and the monopoly, or sole right of extracting the bamboos at that rate from that coupe, is then sold by auction. The purchaser pays the amount bid for the monopoly right, and in addition he is required to purchase rated passes to cover all the bamboos extracted by them. To meet the needs of the local villagers, a conveniently situated portion of each annual coupe is excluded from working by the contractor and remains open for *nistar* extraction. In forest villages a free supply is allowed to the aboriginals of all thorns and wood required for bonafide agricultural purposes, also of such wood and grass for house building and repairs as the Forest Officer may deem reasonable; also of dead wood for fuel, bamboos, and of leaves and edibles required for domestic purposes.* It may be noted that the aboriginals living in a forest village can cut bamboos strictly for domestic purposes. They are not permitted under the rules to exploit bamboos for industrial purposes. In other villages the bamboo rates were found very high for the tribal craftsman. Ordinarily a person has to pay one rupee for a cart-load. It will take one day for him to get to the forest and cut down about 50 to 60 bamboos. Another day is required for cleaning, packing and transporting them to the village. The members of the family or other persons also cooperate in the work. If a bullock cart is utilised to transport the load, additional expenditure to the extent of two rupees is incurred. Thus the cost of 50 bamboos will be :—

Payment of tax = Re. 1/-
Labour (2 persons for two days @ -/12/- per day) = Rs. 3/-
Transport charges = Rs. 2/-

Rs. 6/- or about -/2/- per bamboo

C.P. Forest Manual Vol. I, page 71.

Due to their poor resources the aboriginal artisans are not able to buy stock direct from the forest. They have to purchase it from the bamboo dealers of the bazaars who charge them higher price.

The bamboo craftsmen use very simple tools—namely Katti or Baki Knife (a big knife) and Ambu (a blunt spear head). Both of them are made of iron and not unoften by the local blacksmith. The total cost of these tools ordinarily does not exceed rupees three. If the edge goes blunt the Baiga will go to the Agaria for mending and the charges are covered by 25 seers of grain which the former gives to the latter annually for minor repairs.

The technique of basketry is simple. Green bamboos are brought to the village ; they are closely and carefully cleaned and cut into easily portable sizes. If the shrinking of the article to be produced is not a material point baskets or mats are made out of even green bamboos. Otherwise bamboos are allowed to dry for a couple of days. Thereafter thin but long pieces of pliable nature are prepared and dipped into the water for increasing their pliability. The simplest form of weaving consists of intertwining of pliable branches or twigs between stiff rods. Such wattling is used for fish traps and for the construction of shelters. Closer weaving of pliable materials between warp strands is employed in the manufacture of coarse baskets. Twined weaving is obtained by giving two adjoining strands of the woof. In plain up and down weaving, warp and woof are of the same width and pliability. This type of weaving is used for mats and to a lesser extent in baskets. Baiga introduces variation in technique and design according to the purpose for which a basket is to be used and sometimes to increase its artistic value. Different types of bamboo weaving are seen in the Baiga region, the important among them are : twilled weaving plaited checkwise, plaiting of warp and weft and plaited twill fashion.

The bamboo work is an individualistic craft. The craftsman may take the help of his family members if he is making articles in large numbers and at a quicker speed. Since the craft is of intermittent nature, the worker also engages himself in agriculture and forest work. Thus an individual is the normal labour strength of the craft. Basketry is neither a laborious nor a skilled work. Even the old persons weave baskets and mats at ease and with pleasure. A couple of weeks' training and observation equip the Baiga youth with the necessary skill. The working hours are equally convenient. When a Baiga decides to weave, he would start his work early morning and would carry on till breakfast at 9 A.M. The work would again be resumed in the afternoon under the shade of some tree or the verandah of his cottage. In between there are innumerable breaks and diversions caused by smoking, neighbour's visit or discussion on family affairs with the Baigin. The total working hours usually do not exceed five in a day when no other work is performed. Basketry has, therefore, been called a craft of leisure. The women, however, usually do not weave baskets or mats. They may help men in cleaning, sorting and wetting the bamboo chips. But the actual cutting of bamboos weaving and twisting are done by men. The women's occupation in cooking and the caring of children partially explains her exclusion from the craft. The age long tradition, however, seems to be the main force behind this sex division of labour.

The products of Baiga's bamboo work, if collected at one place, will bear an appearance of a small exhibition of bamboo articles of different sizes, shapes and designs. Generally the Baiga do not use colours ; but the variety in weaving and designs removes the monotony of the natural colour. A square basket of twisted strips (14 inches square and 6 to 8 inches high) is prepared for storing clothes, ornaments and dance equipments. A lid is put to cover nearly half of the height of the basket. Its local name is Sikosi. It has an appearance of a small suitcase. Jhapi is a round basket with elevated cover with an apple like appearance. This is also used for storing clothes, etc. Dali is a circular basket about 16 inches in diameter, 14 inches high, with an aperture at the top of 9 inches for storing grain. It is plaited with warp and weft of very thick bamboo strips, and made stronger with a layer of mud and cow-dung. Kikrahi is a circular basket of different sizes. Wefts and warps of bamboo are woven checkwise. It is generally used for carrying grain or vegetables ; when plastered with mud and cow-dung, it is known as Tukna. Chalgi is a square shallow basket with a handle. It is 6 inches deep and 6 to 9 inches in diameter, with a band of slots round the top. It is used for carrying food to the forest or farm and is often brought back full of roots. The Baiga make special types of baskets for fishing. Mora is a shallow open basket (9 inches square and 5 inches deep) plaited checkwise, used for bailing out water from a stream which has been dammed for fishing. Dhuti is a basket, plaited checkwise. 12 inches long at the bottom, but the mouth contracting to 3½ inches with a string handle fixed at the top. It is used for collecting and bringing fish home from the stream. Other bamboo articles made by the Baiga are : Petla used in squeezing oil ; Churki for storing vegetables ; Bijni—a fan ; Chitti—a bamboo lid placed on earthen cooking pots ; Supa—a winnowing fan.

The majority of these articles is prepared for domestic use. A small number of Baigas sell their products in the neighbouring villages and weekly markets. Those who do not do cultivation for some reason depend on basketry for their livelihood. The products of such families and the surplus of the cultivator families find its way to the market. They are sold for grain or cash. The price of various baskets ranges between 3 and 5 annas. Other minor articles are sold for 1 to 2 annas. If the baskets have been sold to the villagers price is received in grain which may be about ½ seer of *kutki*. But the sales are not effected every week nor throughout the year. Even those who mainly depend on basketry are unable to get access to the weekly markets during the rainy season. The number of Baiga families depending on basketry is not very large; hardly two or three per cent of the total number is engaged in the craft. Basket making is a domestic handicraft or a supplementary occupation at the most. On an average a Baiga family earns about 3 to 5 rupees from this source annually.

Even under the old village order basketry did not bring any substantial cash income to the aboriginal. But the demand for Baiga's products was universal and the occupation was a dependable secondary prop. In recent times, however, certain social and economic changes have altered the position. The Baiga, have almost lost their income from bamboo work. This is partly due to the agitation by the Basor who claimed that the Baiga were infringing their caste or 'Trade Union' rights. so that many Baigas now only make baskets and mats for their own use, and partly due to the corruption of minor officials who catch the unhappy Baigas on the way to the Bazaar and, on the pretext that the bamboo was stolen, take all the fruits of the tribemen's labour for their own profit.* There are additional reasons of economic nature which have reduced the demand for bamboo articles. Firstly, the village industries such as paddy husking and flour grinding in which these articles find use are decaying on account of the advent of rice and flour mills. Secondly, substitutes for bamboo articles have come into vogue. Galvanised iron sheets are fast displacing bamboo 'Tattas' and 'Chatais' formerly used in partitions and fencing. Iron scale-pans and 'taslas'† are ousting bamboo-scale pans and baskets. Only a few people are now using bamboo curtains for their doors. Winnowers and sieves are made even now but the wire sieves have almost ousted them.

In view of the importance of the handicraft as a supplementary source of income to the tribesmen, efforts are required to put it on a sound footing. The supply of cheap raw material will give definite filip to the industry. If some arrangements for imparting instructions and training in the weaving of coloured designs are made, the new products will fetch better prices. The aboriginal craftsmen should be persuaded

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***Elwin : The Baiga, p. 80**

†Iron tray.

to move with the times and make attractive and handy baskets in popular demand. Selected aboriginal craftsmen may first be given training and then appointed as 'touring instructors' for the purpose. To ensure a regular demand and fair price of bamboo articles the Forest Department and the co-operatives should establish Purchasing Depots where aboriginals could sell their articles at a fixed price. The Depots may sell the articles locally or forward them to the urban markets. Emporia displaying the new patterns of basketry at the headquarters of forest officials, important market places, and at schools will be an effective measure for popularising the improved designs among the aboriginal craftsmen. Bamboo work can be introduced as a basic craft in aboriginal schools and the boys can be taught new technique from the very beginning.* If the Baiga boys do bamboo work in the company of and with the help of the boys of other tribesmen, the caste restrictions (which at present bestow monopoly of the craft upon the Basor) will loosen and encourage the Baiga to revive and develop their traditional skill.

The bamboo traps are an important product of the Baiga craftsmen. The basket-maker is a trap-maker too ; for there is hardly any difference in the technique and tools of the two. But the baskets have a wider use ; therefore the demand for them is greater. The traps are made for a specific purpose, although of different shapes and sizes. Most of the traps are made of thin strips of bamboo and hemp strings. The bamboos are collected from the forest, but the hemp is raised in the fields. The stems are kept under the water for a couple of days to take out fibres. The thick fibres are then washed and cleaned in the stream and beaten and converted into strong bright strings. The Baiga go out for fishing preferably during the summer. The traps are, therefore, made or mended before the summer sets in. Although there is no taboo for the women, but the traps are mainly prepared by the male members of the family. The women may assist in cutting or thinning the strips, but the actual making of traps seems to be the monopoly of the male. The traps are not made every year. For on an average a trap lasts from two to three years with annual repairs. The Baiga will seldom prepare a trap for sale. He makes them exclusively for the home use. A neighbour may, however, be obliged ; or a Gond cultivator who had helped him during the scarcity period may be given one. But ordinarily the craft caters the requirements of the family. The motivating force certainly limits the number of traps which a Baiga usually makes but it does not restrict their variety The Kumni is a four feet long tapering trap made of thin strips of bamboo with a mesh. The mouth is nine inches in diameter, and two inches from the top are three *ankhis* (a wall closing the mouth with a small aperture). The force of water carries fish into the tail where the bamboo strips are tied together with string. Jhummar is another fairly big bamboo trap. It has a number of small apertures out of which the fish cannot escape. The Bissera is made of a single piece of bamboo split up into a large number of strips which at last open out into a mouth. Jithka is a slight variation of the Kumni, but much smaller with only one *ankhi*. Chappa is a plunge-trap with a wide, open bottom and a small hole in the top. Thin strips 3 to 4 inches in length are made to stand like a candle extinguisher—string is passed through the strips at the bottom and the top. The Gira is a fairly big net fixed in a large wooden frame. Baigas prepare the frame themselves, of course in a crude form and the net is strung in the holes made in the frame. The Halka-jal or the frame net is something like a large netting basket, the mouth being about 7 × 10 feet stretched by two bamboo pieces crossing each other diagonally. The mouth is placed to face the stream supported by a small stick attached to the back. The water is then beaten with sticks. The fish run into the net and are caught. The Hariyal is a funnel or cone-shaped bamboo net and is placed over a shoal of small fish, but only one or two are caught at a time. The Dhir is a bamboo wicker work placed at the opening of the fields. The Khandi is a cage like bamboo trap which like a mouse trap lets in fish and prevents their egress. Baigas also make cords in fishing. Hooks are attached to the line known by different names like *Chatuwa bansi*, and *Gara* and supplied by the local Agaria. Various kinds of baits are sticked to them – worms, frogs, etc. Other traps discussed in the previous chapter are: Suri, Dang-phanda, Phatki, Daya-phanda, Khujji phanda, Thongu-phanda, Dabka-phanda, Mussa-phanda. All of them are made of bamboo, dhamin wood, string and rope, sambhar sinews and sticky substances and weighty stones. The raw materials are available locally, and an adult Baiga possesses the special skill required for making and using these traps. The young folk play a major role in this sphere. Most of these traps are made on an individual basis. The family keeps a set of all the important traps, the actual number varying with the number of boys or youths in the family. The young boys help one another in making traps. But women have hardly to do anything with the traps. Ordinarily a Baiga will not make traps for sale. At the most he may prepare one for the tribesmen or his neighbour. Since the raw material is not purchased from the market nor the finished product is sold for a price, it is difficult to calculate the cost of production or the money income derived from this craft.

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*Patpara Mission in Mandla district had introduced basket-making in its schools and in a short time the class had become almost self-supporting.

Elwin also commends that education for aboriginals should be based on spinning, woodcarving or the growing of vegetables and fruit trees. The scheme may, however, be simplified and adapted to the use of primitive people.—The Baiga—p. 516.

Bows and Arrows

The Baiga make their bows and arrows with extra-ordinary precision and economy. The stave is made of *dhamin* wood or bamboo of high flexibility. Notches are made at both the ends of the stave into which the stops of the string are tied by cord or leather laces. Thin bamboo strips or sinews of sambhar are used as string. In case the string is made of bamboo, its middle position is further strengthened with a tight coil of sinews. Sometimes a binding of Kosa threads is given to the stave also. Every male adult has a set of two or three bows while the boys also keep smaller bows for killing birds. The arrow is made of a straight thin bamboo, reed or dhamin wood. Kosa or sinews are tied with the arrow head and some feathers are attached to its end for giving speed and straight dash to the arrow. The arrow head is supplied by the local Agaria who is regularly paid about 25 seers of grain annually for rendering petty repair service. To make their arrows more deadly, the tribesmen tip them with poison obtained from indigenous plants. Hunting is a speciality of the male. As a result, the whole sphere, from making of weapons to the kill, is a monopoly of the male. Usually the adults make bows and arrows. The raw material is obtained from the nearby forest except the arrow head which is obtained from the local blacksmith. There is no particular season for making these weapons, but usually the new ones are made and repairs are done to the old in the hunting season namely October and November, and March to May. The bows and arrows are not saleable articles—the Baiga make them invariably for personal use. They may exchange their sets or present to one another gratis ; but the aboriginal will feel insulted if asked to make a set for pittance. However, he will gladly part with his own set if a visitor says a few words of appreciation for his traditional skill and tribal superiority in hunting.

The bow-making, once the speciality of the Baiga tribe and a point of tribal pride, has suffered a set back in recent times. The Game laws have created a nuerosis among the Baiga. The rules in their present form, no doubt, do not prohibit the possession and the use of bows and arrows. But the local forest and other Government officials still maintain an atmosphere of terror in the tribal villages. Prompted by a desire to prove their sovereign powers or to seize the fruit of aboriginal's labour, the petty officials exercise a discouraging influence on the craft. Every craft should first have legal recognition for its development in a peaceful atmosphere. But the present day conditions do not encourage this craft. Baiga makes his bows and arrows in a hush hush atmosphere. He has no opportunity of giving a display of his craftsmanship or hunting skill. His craft, therefore, exists in the midst of a struggle between his traditional urge for excelling in hunting and the officials' chase. Unfortunately not unoften the latter has an upperhand.

Petla

A typical example of Baiga's effort for self-sufficiency is the Petla —an oil-extracting apparatus. Considering Baiga's technological level, the *petla* has comparatively a complicated mechanism. A piece of wood (4'×3') 4½' in length is made to stand on six strong legs nearly 6 inches above the ground. Two wooden beams (6½ ft. long) are fixed to the wood through two holes in the middle. The beams are kept a little apart upto a distance of about 2 ft. but ultimately tied with Mohlain string at the end. A third beam practically of the same length is tied over the previous two giving it a shape of a press. The upper beam can be lifted above, and all the three beams have some flexibility. This completes the permanent fixture of the apparatus. Other accessories are : a flat dish of wood with some depth in the centre to accommodate a small basket, a small basket 6 inches high and 3½ inches in diameter of strips of *udar* bark ¾ inches broad plaited checkwise, a stone-slab of nearly 5 inches in diameter, a flat utensil of metal or earth to receive the oil and finally a string to tie the beams at the other end after inserting the basket of oil seeds in between them.

The oilseeds are produced by Baiga himself. The majority of Baiga grows mustard seed (locally known as Rye) or Ramtilla either in the field or *bari* behind the house. A Baiga seldom purchases oilseeds for his *petla*. If the worst happens the oilseeds are borrowed from the neighbour.

The operation of the Petla is neither difficult nor arduous. The small basket made of fresh *udar* bark is filled with half crushed mustard seed or Ramtilla. It is then placed in the deep part of the flat wooden dish and the stone-slab is placed as a lid on it. The upper beam is laid on the stone-slab and tied with the lower beams. A utensil is placed below the projected mouth of the wooden dish. Two persons usually the wife and husband work the Petla. One of them presses the last end of the beams and other puts pressure on the stone-slab and through it on the basket below. This is repeated two or three times and after every pressure the half-crushed oil seeds are turned upside down. It takes about an hour to crush a basketful of oil seeds which yields about a small cup of oil.

The Baiga are not regular consumers of oil. A meat dish, particularly of fish, necessitates the use of oil. On an average the family consumes oil once a week, and half a *tola* at a time. Many families cannot afford even this scanty quantity of oil. Women apply oil to their hair only once a month and that too in a little quantity. The older women do not use oil at all. Males, though keep long hairs, apply oil only on ceremonial occasions. For lighting purposes the Ramtilla oil is more popular than the mustard oil. The kerosene oil lamp (tin dibri) is, however, fast replacing the Ramtilla oil lamp which is a rarity now, particularly in big villages and market places.

Petla is a household industry solely satisfying domestic needs. Therefore oil is extracted on a small scale. Every family does not possess a Petla. There are two or three Petlas in an average size of a village and all the families can use them without any restriction. For his normal requirements a Baiga family extracts one gourd of oil at a time and four to five gourds in a year, each gourd containing about ¾ seer of oil. But in recent times certain economic forces have brought about a decline of the industry. Hard pressed by their cash needs, Baigas sell off their oil seeds to the itinerant trader and purchase oil from the weekly markets. Development of roads and motor transport has further facilitated the collection of oil seeds from interior parts by the traders and moneylenders. Since oil is readily available in the weekly markets the aboriginal succumbs to the convenience. Again kerosene oil is ousting the Ramtilla oil formerly used for lighting purposes. Baiga finds it more convenient to buy edible oils along with the kerosene oil for which he has to go at least once in a month. The change to a predominantly cereal diet due to the game laws and corrupt officials has further reduced the quantity of oil which Baiga used to consume. Change in the manner of the disposal of oil seeds, easy oils in the weekly markets, coming of kerosene lamp into vogue and availability of change over to cereal diet are slowly minimising the importance of petla in Baiga household economy.

Tattooing

The broad features of certain crafts connected with the cultural life of the Baiga deserve analysis. Baiga lives in wild jungles, but the sense of beauty is quite awakened in him. He decorates his body with tattooing, ornaments, coiffure, combs and tufts of peacock's feathers. Most of the decoration articles are made by Baiga himself. The tatto marks do not indicate any tribal or esoteric significance. They are simply decorative and ornamental devices. A spiritual sentiment is also attached to these marks ; for the Baiga women believe that these marks are the only things that are certain to go with them to the other world. Men are seldom tatooed, but in cases of rheumatism the affected parts are tattooed with deep marks.

Except the Mandla area, tattooing is done by the Baigin. In Balaghat District the Baigin usually tattoos the Gondin and others, but in Mandla District she is tattooed by the Badnin or Godnaharin. The Baiga prepare a special kind of ink ; the cast skin of snake and black *til* are burnt, powdered, and then mixed in *ramtilla* oil. There is an alternative formula for preparing the ink ; the black powder condensed from smoke is mixed with the burnt bark of pterocarpus marsupium.

Girl's arms and breasts are not tattooed until she has attained adolesence and her legs are tattooed only after marriage. When the girl is five, a triangular mark is made on her forehead ; after puberty, a peacock on the breast and *haldi-gath* (the turmeric-root) on the arm are the preferred figures. After the marriage various kinds of figures are tattooed on knee, thighs, back and legs. The process is of course, very painful. But the Baiga women endure it with pride and courage. After tattooing the girl remains confined for two days. Later she is powdered with turmeric and massaged with oil and she bathes. At the time of tattooing the husband is forbidden to watch the operation.

The rates of tattooing were quite low in the pre-war days. The Godnaharin charged one anna for the mark on forehead, four annas for each arm and four annas for the breasts, eight annas for each thigh, four annas for each leg and five annas for the back. But these rates have risen by 50 per cent after the War. According to the general practice the cost of tattooing is paid by the girl's father upto marriage, but afterwards the father-in-law foots the whole bill.

In recent times the craft of tattooing has lost its importance as a source of income to the tribe. The Badnin (a separate caste*) enjoys a monopoly in the Mandla District. But even Badnin is loosing the ground due to the itinerant tattooers in the weekly markets who use mechanical devices in the process. Besides, Baiga woman's liking for tattooing is now not so intense as before, probably due to her contact with Hindu women among whom tattooing is not so much popular. May be women's faith in its permanence and immortality is shaken. During the course of our tour of Baiga villages many women were found without tattoo marks or they had only symbols on the arms.

Combs

Baigas pay the greatest attention to their hair. Both men and women grow very long hair and consider them an important aspect of their physical beauty. Naturally Baiga girl is very fond of her little wooden combs called Kakai. She does not comb her hair daily. Yet she would tuck two or three combs in her coiffure as token from her admirers. They make their own combs in addition to the fancy combs purchased from the market. Tiny but sharp bamboo strips are tied together with string or sinews in the shape of a comb. The bamboo strips get soaked in oil and become quite flexible and durable.

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*C.P. & Berar Census Report 1931, p. 407.

Dance dress

Baigas are renowned dancers. They take particular care of dress and decoration. The metal ornaments and bead necklaces are purchased from the weekly markets or fairs. But other articles of decoration and musical instruments are made by the Baiga themselves. Both men and women decorate their heads with tufts of peacock's feathers. Women tuck them in their hair and the men in their turbans. These tufts are made by young women in a very artistic manner. Beautiful, white and long strips of peacock's feathers are woven into a kind of crown. Baigas prepare these tufts only for their personal use. They may weave a few for mutual presentation but never for sale. As peacocks' feathers are collected from the forest, it is difficult to calculate the cost of tufts in terms of money. Small finger rings of hiran-bark are put on by women. Tiski are a kind of wooden clappers prepared by the Baiga themselves. Their handle is made of a thin bamboo strip while the clappers are made of wood. Other important musical instruments : the Mandar, a long drum made of earth and faced at either end with bullock-skin ; the Dhol is a large wooden drum skin-faced at either end ; the Vangara is a conical earthen vessel bound with leather strips. Cow or goat skin is stretched across the top. The Tunki is a small earthen drum covered with leather at the top. Baigas do not make any of these instruments in their complete form. They may buy the earthen drum of the mandar and take it to the chamar for skin covering. The wooden drum of the Dhol is chiselled out by him, but for skin-facing he must go to the chamar. He may supply skin or sinews from his hunt ; but for completing the instrument he has to depend on others for one or the other process.

Baigas prepare attractive and handy tobacco purses and pouches. Every adult keeps a small purse containing tobacco for smoking, some lint and a piece of iron and stone to generate fire, a thorn pick and a small comb. The pouches are very convenient to handle being 5″×8″ in size. They are made of sambhar skin or hemp, but the Baiga's preference is for the former which is more beautiful as well as durable. The sambhar hide is tanned and coloured by indigenous methods. It becomes quite glossy and shining. It is then cut into sizeable pieces and stitched with sinews or thread. Some pounches are mere small bags, while others are divided into two or three pockets. The Baiga may have more than one pouch– the more beautiful is reserved for special occasions like marriage or Dussehra festival. Generally Baigas do not make pouches for sale. Purse-making is thus an household handicraft. A purse is, therefore, prepared only when the previous one is torn or it has been lost. Considering Baiga's attitude towards purse it can be inferred that much propaganda will have to be done for developing purse-making as a cottage handicraft turning out articles for sale. Reorganisation of such a craft is, therefore, a special problem rather than a question of technical improvement. First of all it will have to be impressed upon the Baiga that purse-making can be a supplementary source of income. But the craft can play its new role only when its technique, product and the scale of production are adjusted to the demand of rural people in general and the town people in particular. The craft will then attain a new economic status ; but it will certainly lose its present domestic character. The sentiment, personal attention and application of the tribal art which today characterises the craft will disappear. It will be converted into a trade prompted by profit motive. An attempt should, therefore, be made to retain the present motive of the craft—namely, Baiga's artistic sense and personal interest.

Effects of Culture-contact

Culture-contact is slowly changing the basis of Baiga's handicrafts. The roads have established new links between the market and Baiga's home. There is now a greater flow of goods from and to weekly markets in the tribal areas. Frequent visits of the forest contractors and officials give Baiga an opportunity of seeing new articles of wear, decoration and diet. The urban goods displayed in the markets further accentuate their desire to experiment with new articles. As a result, the tribesmen have begun to use certain new articles like kerosene lamps, new designs of cloth, brass and aluminium utensils and new ornaments. The coming of new articles has not only made Baigas dependent on external market, but has also brought about a decline of certain aboriginal crafts. For example, increased consumption of kerosene oil has given a set-back to the aboriginal method of extracting oil from mustard and ramtilla seed. Similarly the new ornaments are displacing the bark-rings, tufts of peacock's feathers and flowers tucked in coiffures. In many villages the indigenous bamboo umbrellas have gone out of use; and their place has been taken by urban type of cloth umbrellas.

The plough cultivation has introduced a fundamental change in the tribal industries connected with the .collection and preservation of wild roots and fruits. Under the axe-cultivation Baigas raised Kodon-Kutki enough to meet their requirements of cereal. In the remaining time they collected various kinds of roots and tubers and chased the wild animals. This arrangement enabled Baigas to maintain a harmony between their cultivation and the forest activities. The Baiga in olden days had evolved an elaborate technique of collecting wild food which ensured a regular supply of food articles all the year round. Besides, under the old order the Baiga diet contained enough quantity of vegetables and animal food. But the adoption of plough cultivation has caused a definite change in Baiga's food and the activities connected with it. Plough cultivation requires continuous work and attention on the part of the Baiga; and therefore it does not leave enough time at Baiga's disposal for gathering, drying and storing the wild food. Consequently Baigas of the newer generation. particularly those who have come into contact with the ordinary cultivators, are not adept in collecting and preserving forest products for dietary purposes. It will be no surprise if the next generation forgets the names, places of growth and the methods of locating, collecting and preserving certain roots and tubers with which the older generation was so familiar. The change over to plough cultivation has diverted Baiga's energies from the food-gathering and storing craft to agricultural production.

The Game laws of modern administration are also responsible for discouraging the hunting and fishing activities among Baigas. As discussed earlier the Game Laws have altered the character of the Baiga hunting. The forest tribe formerly living on fruits of the chase and the natural gifts of the forest, have been reduced to the position of resourceless cultivator. The corrupted petty officials of the Government have further created terror among the aboriginals through their dishonest practices and the wrong interpretation and enforcement of the laws. Consequently not only the art of hunting and fishing has suffered but a number of handicrafts like making of bows and arrows, traps and nets, and dehydrating and preserving meat are also dying. Where the forest or police staff have harassed the tribals more (who are more Government fearing than others) the latter have forgotten the crafts of weaving nets and traps and making bows and arrows with any precision.

The advent of money economy has also affected the tribal crafts. The payment of land revenue in cash, money wages paid by the contractors and Forest Department, cash payment at the counter of the liquor shop and increased cash transactions between the money-lender and the aboriginal, have led to the establishment of money economy in tribal life. The change has affected Baiga's household crafts in a number of ways. In many crafts the money incentive is now working more vigorously than satisfaction of family want for the product of a particular craft. For example, the Baiga families, living near weekly markets or mixed villages, prepare baskets for sale. Thus cash return and not the need of the family is the motivating force behind the craft in such villages. This has led to an expansion in the scale of production, change in the technique and the manner of disposal of the finished product. Ready income of cash induces the Baiga to devote more time to the craft, utlimately leading to a sort of occupational specialisation. But Baiga's resources are limited and the demand for his articles is restricted by local conditions. Therefore he is not able to carry specialisation too far as to take full advantage of the system. In fact, the half-specialisation of this type only destroys the diversification of tribal economy without conferring compensatory benefits of specialisation.

A fundamental change is thus creeping into Baiga crafts. The household crafts of diversified character which formerly catered primarily for the family needs, are developing into cottage crafts turning out articles for sale in the markets or big mixed villages. Had this change been accompanied with a corresponding improvement in the Baiga's financial and technical resources and by an expansion in the demand for the articles of his craft, the Baiga craftsmen would have been well off. But as things are the culture contact has exposed the aboriginal crafts to caste monopolies which led to the distribution of industries among individual castes and tribes. It is widely believed in the tribal areas that it is wrong and even dangerous to practise any craft belonging to another caste. Baigas were faced with Basod's caste monopoly claims for the bamboo work and in many villages the former had to give up basket making as the village elders supported Basod's stand. In the old order when communications were difficult and the bazaars in hills were few each isolated tribe depended on its own efforts for all the material goods that it required. Then gradually culture contact led to the emergence of separate occupational castes resulting in the impoverishment of the older tribes. The Baiga had to give up many of their older crafts and began to purchase cloth from the Panka, iron goods from the Agaria, brass from the Ghasia. Where the touch with outside world has not shaken the tribal arts, as in Bastar, "the still unimpaired aesthetic sense of the people drives them to create beauty, to blend colours, to delight in the shape and embellishment of material things."*. The Marias carve their drum out of wood, their head-dress is a thing of beauty and dignity every connoisseur will be delighted to see their dancing dress, beautifully blended necklaces, ear drops, head bands, corrie belts and streamers, wooden tobacco holders, knife sheaths, combs, head rests and musical instruments. But the tragic part of culture-contact is that it has destroyed this love of decoration and power to create useful and beautiful things. There is enough truth in Elwin's observation that "the Mandla aboriginal, even the Baiga, appears drab and wretched. Some of them retain their sense of beauty, but directly a Baiga goes to school or comes much in contact with outsiders he sinks to the same dead level of inartistic futility."

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*Elwin: 'Loss of Nerve', p. 34.

Nobody will like to see a Baiga sinking to the 'dead level of inartistic futility'. His crafts must be saved from ruin, and whenever possible new crafts should be introduced keeping in view the natural conditions of the tract and social traditions of the tribe. The fundamentals of the future policy for tribal crafts are discussed under 'Rehabilitation of the Tribe'. Some suggestions about reorganisation of the existing crafts and starting new ones are, however, discussed below.

Possibilities of some new industries

It is difficult to draw up a detailed scheme for the revival of tribal crafts as local conditions and resources have to be studied by experts. However, the possibilities of some new industries as suggested by experts may be examined with benefit. From the point of view of their future development the tribal industries can be classified into two broad categories, namely industries which are entirely new for the tribals or which require basic changes. and secondly those industries which are already in existence but need some improvement.

Let us consider the industries of the first category. The Baiga region is a land of dense forests supplying various kinds of timber and wood. Baiga is a reputed wood-cutter and possesses expert knowledge of timber. Both raw material and requisite labour are available in the region—only an intelligent co-ordination between man and nature is needed to develop wood work on profitable lines. In spare time the Baiga can make agricultural implements, articles of domestic use and the ordinary furniture commonly used by the rural people. Wherever better and cheaper transport facilities are available the aboriginals can organise themselves into a cooperative society and prepare articles on a larger scale. If Government Departments decide to purchase their requirements of furniture from the forest areas through the Forest Department, tribal's wood work will receive direct and effective impetus. In order to popularise woodcraft and spread the knowledge of new tools and technique, the craft may be introduced in aboriginal schools, which will on the one hand remove the caste prejudices against carpentry, and on the other, make the tribal education more useful and realistic.

Natural conditions of the Baiga land hold a very bright future for apiculture. The vast and thick forest canopy, particularly in the ravines and on stream banks, is a hospitable host for the bees. The flowering seasons of different trees and creepers provide almost a year round cycle for the bees. Baiga has a natural enthusiasm for honey collection. At present his methods are destructive and crude resulting in the collection of impure honey. It is alleged that Baiga is very cruel in felling trees and destroying the hive. Personal discussions with Baigas, however, disclosed that their ignorance of improved methods of apiculture is responsible for this state of affairs. An elementary training in apiculture to the forest guards, *mukkadams*, school teachers and *patwaris* will prove helpful in spreading the knowledge of modern apiculture among the tribals. Further, if these persons keep bee boxes at their headquarters, the tribals will have an opportunity of seeing the practical process personally. The Forest Department may be instructed to arrange demonstrations of modern equipment and technique at important weekly markets and fairs. A higher price for better and purer quality of honey, if assured by the Department, will certainly encourage the aboriginals to adopt new methods. Opening of depots by Forest Department at important centres for the purchase, grading and packing of honey can ensure a fair deal to the tribesmen.

The Baiga land abounds in wild animals and birds. The wild life supplies hides and skins, bones, horns, sinews, feathers etc. throughout the year, in abundance. Most of these materials at present go waste or they are sent to the plains in raw condition. Outside contractors arrange for their collection to some extent ; but as observed by us a large quantity of these materials remains unutilised and ultimately decomposes. Baiga makes their limited use in his own way. The hides and skins are exchanged for liquor or salt in the weekly market or tobacco pouches are made out of them. The horns are used as hangers fixed by the roof and the feathers are tied to the arrow. But such uses do not bring any additional income to the Baiga except some salt or liquor. Handicrafts based on these materials can be a good source of supplementary income to the aboriginal. What can be done in this direction is indicated by the experiments carried out by the Goseva Charmalaya, Nalwadi (Wardha). As soon as a carcass is brought to them they flay it and send the hide to be tanned. The intestines are cleared of their contents for manurial purposes. The bone and flesh are boiled to extract the fat which is sold for the preparation of lubricants. The tendons and intestines are taken out for purposes of gut making. The boiled bones and flesh when free from fat are powdered and made into bone-meal and meat-meal manure. From the fleshings glue is made. Various articles such as combs, boxes, shoe-horns, shuttle cocks, buttons, apper cutters, handles for razors, knives, umbrellas and waling sticks, cigarette holders, snuff boxes, pen holders and other such articles can be made out of horns. If the forest tribesmen can be taught the craft of working horns into useful articles, they may be able to follow this as a subsidiary occupation. Since the Baigas hold a prejudice against touching the carcass of dead animal, it may not be possible to introduce industries involving the handling of dead animal. But they have no objection in handling their own kill. Therefore, those crafts will succeed more easily which utilise the by-products of hunting like hides and skins of wild animals, horns, bones, sinews and feathers. The task is enormous and needs establishment of a separate section for aboriginal industries either under the Department of Industries or the Department of Forest.

Baiga enjoys a high reputation as medicineman in the tribal areas. He has a wonderful knowledge of indigenous medicinal herbs and roots. His special knowledge can be utilised in collecting, grading and storing of herbs and roots of medicinal value. At present some Baigas take these materials to the weekly markets; but there is neither a regular demand nor organised sale of the herbs. Consequently the job is done indifferently by the Baiga. It has already ceased as a source of income of any significance. But the occupation is not dead completely. The Forest Department in consultation with the Public Health Department can organise the collection and storing of indigenous herbs. Where the aboriginal has forgotten the art, he will have to be trained for identifying the correct species, know the proper season of collection, avoid adulteration and dehydrate and store them carefully. The industry need not be restricted to mere collection work. It may be developed at important centres further for grading, preparing and packing indigenous drugs and medicines to be despatched to urban centres. The industry, if developed, will utilise the local talent, add to the income of the aboriginal, make more medicines available to the local population and finally render great help to the cause of indigenous system of medicine.

Paper making with hand can usefully be started in aboriginal tracts. A regular supply of raw materials like Salai wood, grasses, leaves, stems, barks, bamboos, stalks and fibres can be obtained locally at a very cheap rate. Other subsidiary raw materials like bleaching chemicals will have to be imported from outside. And similarly the implements for some time will be imported from urban centres. But later on when the wood work is sufficiently developed, the plant except its iron parts can be manufactured locally. The industry will be quite new to the tribals and, therefore, in initial stages skilled labour will not be available locally. Sufficient propaganda will have to be done for popularising the craft among the tribals. But it may be noted that paper making is an ideal cottage industry because the whole family can take part in it. There are certain heavy operations such as preparing the pulp, a few moderately hard tasks such as sizing and glazing and some very simple operations like preparing stationery. Thus the industry can draw forth the best in every member of the family, skilled or unskilled, old or young, man or woman and provide gainful employment to many an indigent family. However, special measures will have to be taken with regard to the disposal of the product of the industry because there is no ready demand for paper in the tribal area. If the Departments of Tribal Welfare, Forest and Cooperatives give special preference to the hand made paper, the industry will not suffer from lack of demand for its product.

The Mandla and Balaghat districts are considered the best coffee regions in the State. The red sloping soils of these regions are best suited for coffee cultivation. High lands of an altitude of 1,500 ft. to 3,000 ft. provide very congenial climate for coffee plants. The rainfall is equally high (about 50 to 60 inches annually) around the Amarkantak plateau. The most important requirement for the growth of coffee plant is shade trees. In Mandla region natural canopy is provided by dense forests. Coffee is not a new crop to Madhya Pradesh. There were 13 coffee estates of 107 acres in the State in 1948-49. Considering the topograhpical and climatic conditions prevailing in certain regions and the experience gained at Khamla and Chikalda estates, the Agriculture Policy Committee of Madhya Pradesh, 1951, suggested to develop coffee plantation where thick shade is already available in some of the reserved forests. The adivasis, who are the only inhabitants of these mountaineous tracts, could be provided with the seedlings and shown the proper way of planting them and establishing small coffee estates. This will provide a good remunerative occupation to these people and also add considerably to the wealth of the State. The *bari* (a small plot of land attached to Baiga's cottage) in which the Baiga at present raise tobacco and maize, will be the best land for coffee in the initial stages. Its closeness to the cottage will make constant watch possible. It is a well manured plot in which the refuse of poultry and piggery is thrown everyday. A little push on the part of the Forest Department can popularise coffee cultivation in the tribal areas.

Every Baiga of average means keeps cattle The greater the area of farm, the larger is the number of cattle. But Baigas do not breed cattle either for dairy purposes or as professional breeders like the Ahirs. Since the milk yield of hill cattle is extremely poor, and the means of transport are meagre, Baigas have not found it a profitable proposition to breed cattle on dairy lines. Bullocks and dry cows are kept for draught purposes and a few cows for milk for children. Some times Ahirs come to the Baiga villages for buying cattle; but such visits are not as frequent as to the villages of the plains. For the Baiga reside in inaccessible parts of the hills. When a Baiga is in need of cash for cloth, marriage or paying debt, he sells away his cattle in the nearby village or in some cattle fair.

Before cattle breeding becomes an industry among the Baiga, a number of difficulties will have to be surmounted. The hill breeds are very poor in milk yield and their disease resisting power is equally poor. Concerted efforts will, therefore, have to be made to develop a breed which can flourish in the hill regions. Baiga himself is not so much conversant with the art of cattle breeding, and preparing and preserving milk and its products. He needs training in the art to come up to the level of the ordinary peasant. Undeveloped transport is another hurdle which can be removed only slowly. Unless cheap and quick transport is made available in the tribal tracts, the Baiga will not feel encouraged for rearing cattle for milk and ghee. In the existing conditions, the Baiga can at the most be expected to make some ghee. But even in this field they need protection against the grabbing activities of the middlemen operating in the trade.

Poultry farming has a very bright future in the forest areas. Unlike the caste Hindus the Baiga have no religious prejudice against poultry keeping. In fact, eggs and chickens are used for propitiating the tribal gods. The Baiga even now keep fowls both for domestic use and for sale. Poultry forms a very important cottage industry throughout the State. It lives on the domestic refuse. It costs nothing to maintain, and the eggs and chicks obtained from these birds are secured gratis and bring positive income to the slander resources of the tribals. Poultry farming is thus one of the few cheap and remunerative cottage industries which can be taken up even by the poorest.

The industry needs development in two directions. Firstly, an improvement in local poultry birds must be effected. This can be done by encouraging the tribals to keep a few poultry birds of local breed and improve them by grading with improved cockerels, and thus gradually substituting the country uneconomical fowl by high grade birds of good laying capacity. The graded birds will be able to stand up to adverse conditions better than pure-breeds in forest tracts. But in these schemes the main handicap is the question of supply of feed-grain which is in short supply at present, and there is the perennial competition between man, animal and bird. Poultry extension has, therefore, to be developed on the key-village pattern in compact areas where entire flocks in the villages could be taken up and developed with the use of the superior cockerels.*

The pig has already a place in Baiga economy. Pork is seldom missed on ceremonial occasions. Narayan Deo, the benevolent tribal god, is offered a male pig called Laru at the Larukaj ceremony. Pig is an important source of non-vegetarian diet and the Baiga delights in rearing a large number of pigs. They are almost members of the family and to every cottage is attached a pigsty looked after by the housewife. But at present pig-rearing is neither an organised industry nor a source of money income to the Baiga. It is still not realised by the Baiga that pigs besides a source of food can also add to their slander income. They cut bristles, but exchange them for ordinary articles like salt and sundry spices. The Forest or Industries Department has not done anything for developing the industry. A fruitful line of approach to the improvement of this animal and the industries based on its bristles would be to grade it up with foreign breeds like the Middle-Whites and Berkshire. Other States, which have taken up this work on similar lines, have found this cross-breeding work quite a profitable undertaking. The aborigines can take up this work who have no conscientious objection to the handling of pigs. The economic return from graded pigs will amply repay the little expenditure incurred on the improvement of the local type**.

Pigs provide a raw material of great industrial importance namely bristles. Brush-making can be developed as a very remunerative cottage industry in the Baiga land. The bristles of hill-pigs are of finer quality and wood of every kind is available in abundance in forests for handles and backs. Hairs of other animals like goat, cow, horse, squirrel, *sambhar*, *nilgai* etc. can also be used along with pig bristles. The industry can provide employment to all the members of the family or group of persons in the village as it has many processes namely pig-rearing, bristle cutting, sorting, standardising, cleaning, dressing, washing and forming of bundles. The whole work will be possible in the natural setting of the village. A little initiative and effort on the part of some official or non-official agency can develop a very useful and profitable industry in the tribal areas.

*** See Reports of C.P. Industrial Survey Committee (1939) Part I, Vol. 2, p. 128 and Agriculture Policy Committee (1952) Madhya Pradesh, p. 105.**

**** Report of the Madhya Pradesh Agriculture Policy Committee (1952) p. 105.**

CHAPTER VIII

MARKETING AND TRANSPORT IN BAIGA LAND

By its very nature the Baiga economy affords restricted scope for exchange transactions. Baiga's basic needs are few in number and strictly limited in variety. Coarse grain, wild roots and game, salt and a strip of cloth and country liquor meet his consumption budget. Even for these limited wants the tribals are not required to resort to exchange except for salt, cloth and liquor. Baigas produce most of their foodgrains. Wild fruits and roots and meat are his supplementary food. Every straw of his cottage is a local product, and the cottage is the result of his personal labour. The iron implements are, no doubt, bought from the local blacksmith but a host of other tools, weapons, snares and nets are made by the aboriginal himself. For liquor he depends on the liquor shop if he decides to obey the law but partly he is self-sufficient when he resorts to illicit distillation. The self-sufficient character of the Baiga economy thus (though shaken by modern forces) restricts the scope of exchange transactions in tribal life. Physical and social factors operating in the tract further reduce the volume and frequency of buying and selling. Whenever a Baiga family is short of foodgrains or salt his neighbour comes to his rescue. The practice of reciprocal aid among the Baiga thus often obviates the necessity of exchanging one's surplus stock of a commodity with another. Again, limited use of money as medium of exchange in the aboriginal villages automatically confines exchange activities to barter proper. The tribal economy moves round foodgrains and not money—keeping exchange transactions to the minimum. From trader's point of view Baiga villages are not an attractive or profitable proposition. Most of the real Baiga clusters are situated in inaccessible places which involve not only heavy transport charges but also great risk and inconvenience to an outsider. Moreover Baiga's poor buying capacity exercises a damping effect upon the trader who does not find even a potential market in such villages and, therefore, does not spread his business there.

There is, however, another set of forces working in the opposite direction. Baiga's settlement as a plough-cultivator has converted his axe-cultivation economy into a farm economy. The change has necessitated more exchange transactions. Baiga now requires more iron implements, plough, draught cattle and more seeds. For buying these he should either barter away his own product or collect money by selling them. Besides, he needs more cash for paying land revenue, grazing tax and *nistar* charges. The new conditions have necessitated cultivation of cash crops like *rai* and *jagni* disposal of which brings Baiga's into contact with the trader and his market. The present forest policy is also responsible for expanding tribal's marketing activities. *Harra*, lac, honey, wax, *tendu* leaves etc. which had formerly little exchange value have now attained a significant position in Baiga economy. Forest Department auctions contract for the minor produce and the aboriginal is required to collect these commodities on wage cum profit basis; but their illicit collection and sale is a well known secret occupation of the forest tribes. The most important effect of the present day forest policy may, however, be seen in the advent of money wage system in aboriginal areas. Investigations revealed that 44.8 per cent of the total income of the Baiga family is earned from forest and road work. The system has shaken the very foundation of tribal self-sufficiency. Money income has made him dependent on the market in many respects. Baigas are now seen buying foodgrains from the market, his other requirements like tobacco, spices, oil and ornaments which formerly he used to produce or make himself are also bought from the market or itinerant trader. Then Baiga's growing contact with the outside world has created in him a new outlook and new wants. He tries to imitate the 'civilised', often he is charmed away by the glittering articles of modern taste like glass bangles or beads, mirrors, combs, colours, bright clothes, metal utensils, lamps, boxes etc., etc. As a result, his buying activities have increased in recent times. Another strong factor which compels Baiga to earn more cash and takes him to the weekly market is the licensed liquor shop. In the olden days his leaf cup was filled by the home-distillery. But under the modern excise administration he has to buy liquor from the licensed liquor shop. This requires him to earn money by selling his produce in the market. Most of the liquor shops are located in market-villages, where the aboriginal is able to sell his produce and at the same time buy liquor from the nearby shop. Consequently the weekly markets have become an attraction for the aboriginal. Baiga begins his romantic adventures in a market, meets his friends and enjoys a picnic. As a result, the liquor shop, market, and social meetings have become inseparable from one another. Development of roads, growing culture-contact and increase in general population are further expanding marketing activities of the tribesmen. Modern forces are neutralising the factors which had uptil now kept the Baiga villages in economic isolation. The Baiga home and farm are now increasingly linked with the market. The process is bound to gain speed with the execution of development schemes.

As stated earlier, Baiga is not self-sufficient in an absolute sense. Even in olden days he bought salt and cloth from outside. More commodities have now been added to this list : Kerosene oil, spices, metal utensils, iron implements, seeds and cattle. But marketing in the hills is a very difficult problem. The rugged and inaccessible country walled by mountain ranges and cut up by deep valleys, renders communication very difficult. The markets are, therefore, situated at long distances. Daily marketing under such circumstances is almost impossible. Hence the need of periodical market gatherings at convenient centres where exchange and sale of commodities may be effected by the aboriginals. This has led to holding of weekly markets or annual fairs throughout the Baiga region. Adjoining bazaars are usually arranged on a rotation, so that the itinerant vendors, who handle most of the trade, may be able to visit a different bazaar every day.

The weekly bazaars usually begin at about 1 p.m. Streams of people, both sellers and buyers are seen making their way towards the village with carts, packhorses, head and Kawar loads. Work remains suspended in the home village. Therefore many flock to the market on a small pretext. They assemble at the regular bazaar site which is sometimes in the main village street, sometimes in a grove or other suitable spot outside. The resourceful traders erect a tent-shop and arrange window display, while the humble Mararin, with her few withered vegetables, simply spreads out a garment or matting on the ground and lays her wares on it.

The principal classes of dealers are: the Marars, who bring green vegetables, chillies, onions, sugarcane, etc., for sale. Next, the tobacco-sellers, who keep tobacco, snuff and *biris* besides all sorts of spices; the cloth-sellers, including the village weavers, who have brought in two or three clothes which they have woven during the week. Then there is the Manihar whose stall glitters with an assortment of cheap mirrors, hardware, knives and scissors, nutmeg graters, small tins and bottles etc., etc. The seller of bangles, whether of metal or glass is a constant attraction for the womanfolk who buy bangles not only for themselves but for their relations and friends left at home. The seller of brass pots heaps his picturesque and clattering wares but attracts only the well-to-do customers. And then there is a row of aboriginal men and women sellers who have brought in Kawars and baskets the nature's varied gifts—tubers, roots, leaves, medicinal herbs, wild fruits, *rai*, *jagni*, honey, wax, lac, bamboo work, ropes, Agaria's iron tools and implements, dried or fresh fish.

The whole scene is one of the greatest animation, the constant coming and going of buyers, the cries of vendors to attract passersby, the clatter of the bargaining tongues, the dust, the smells of queer spices and sweet stuff, the glitter of the metal wares, the bright mixture of coloured clothes, the rows of cattle standing for sale, all make up a picture that must present itself to the dweller in the peaceful aboriginal village as a pleasant break in the monotony of the week. The tribal folk readily go in for a drink and create an atmosphere of merry-making. An aboriginal market, therefore, presents a sight of happy activity than of confusion and tension.

The economic basis of these markets is, however, not so exhilarating as their appearance indicates. They are seller's markets in which a few sellers enjoy the upper hand. As the number of shopkeepers is always small, anyone who is able to reach these markets and displays some articles for sale, enjoys a semi-monopolist's position. Absence of competition among sellers leaves the aboriginal customer entirely at the mercy of the former. Buyer's real tragedy lies in the fact that most of his requirements consist of bare necessaries of life like salt, cloth, earthenware, oil and agricultural implements, which he must buy at any cost. The time at which he purchases these articles further increases the inelasticity of his demand. Salt is usually purchased once a month or so. But the aboriginal must buy salt which may last from three to four months during the rainy season. The shopkeeper has, therefore, a good time to charge high price for salt before the monsoons break out. Similarly a Baiga purchases cloth when his *langoti* fails to hide his or his wife's shame, or at the time of marriage. In both the cases he cannot postpone his purchase. The cloth dealer fully exploits the situation. It was observed that a Sari (called Kapra by the Baiga) which was sold for Rs. 7 to 8 in Jabalpur was priced at Rs. 12 to Rs. 15 in the tribal markets of the interior. As most of the transactions are of a petty nature the shop keepers, who are two or three in the market, combine themselves against the buyers and charge high retail prices. Aboriginal's illiteracy and ignorance and the urgency of his requirements give full scope to vendor's greed and profiteering activities. There are hardly any middlemen between the buyer and seller; the transaction is effected directly. Consequently a shopkeeper has the fullest opportunity to fleece the simple aboriginal without the intervention of the third party. Baiga's another weakpoint is that often he does not come to the market with enough cash to buy his requirements; part of the price he pays in forest or agricultural produce. The shopkeeper has a chance to buy aboriginal's produce at a lower price. And in weights and measures too, which we discuss ahead, the vendor does enough mischief. The number of credit sales is not very large in tribal markets, for the vendor has little faith in aboriginal's financial soundness. However, when commodities are sold on credit the usual rate of interest charged is over

50 per cent. Thus, the weekly markets which on the one hand break the monotony of tribal life, on the other hand break the consumption budget of the simple aboriginal population.

Number of weekly markets and the area served

To have some approximate idea of marketing activities in the Baiga region, we select a compact and contiguous area of Dindori, Mandla and Baihar tehsils. There are 29 weekly markets in Mandla tehsil, 16 in Dindori and 19 in Baihar. In all 64 weekly markets are spread over 5225 sq. miles serving 1885 villages populated by 5,22,611 persons. Using the rough method of average, each market covers an area of 82 sq. miles, serves 8166 persons living in 29 villages. The following table depicts the market facilities in each tehsil selected for the purpose :

NUMBER OF WEEKLY MARKETS IN SELECTED TEHSILS OF BAIGA REGION AND AREA AND NUMBER OF VILLAGES SERVED BY THEM

Tehsil	Total Area (Sq. Miles)	Total No. of villages	Total No. of persons	Total No. of markers	Average area served by a market (Sq. miles)	Average No. of villages served by a market	Average No. of persons served by a market
Mandla	2,108	853	2,55,367	29	73	29	8,806
Dindori	1,561	568	1,42,472	16	98	36	8,904
Baihar	1,556	464	1,24,772	19	82	24	6,567
TOTAL	5,225	1,885	5,22,611	64	82	29	8,166

It will be seen from the above table that the number of villages and the area served by a market in different tehsils differ considerably. In Mandla tehsil on an average a market serves 29 villages populated by 8806 persons in an area of 73 sq. miles, in Baihar a market serves 24 villages populated by 6567 persons in an area of 82 sq. miles and in Dindori 36 villages with 8904 persons in an area 98 sq. miles. The variation in the number of villages and persons served by a market in different tehsils is explained by the topographical and agricultural conditions and the development of transport in different tehsils. Dindori tehsil is the most rugged part of the Baiga Region where the total number of markets is the lowest, and the number of persons and villages served and the area covered by a market are the largest. In Mandla tehsil where the level plains of Haweli and Pathar afford better opportunities for agricultural and transport development, the conditions are somewhat better, that is, market serves lesser number of villages and persons. In Baihar tehsil except the Saletekri plateau, the upper land is plain and bullock carts ply without much difficulty. Agriculturists are also comparatively more prosperous. As a result, a market in Baihar on an average serves 24 villages with 6567 persons—the lowest number among three tehsils. However, these averages need to be qualified further. For instance, the persons served by an average market, do not all come in person to the market and those who come do not do so all at a time. The children who cannot walk long distances, the women who have to look after domestic work, the aged and the invalid – all are left at home on the market day. Then persons able to go to the market do not go every week. Enquiries revealed that generally Baigas visit the market once a fortnight. Statistical figures could not be collected about the number of persons attending a tribal market but on the strength of personal observation of about 20 tribal markets it may be stated that on an average (very roughly speaking) 2000 to 3000 persons attend an average size weekly tribal market. Difficult topographical conditions may interfere with the average number of persons attending a market. The number of villages served and the area covered may be double the average number. Such conditions prevail in South-East of Dindori, Kawardha border and South of Mandla tehsil. The Baiga Chak and its outflanking area has not a single weekly market. Similarly the Saletekri plateau is completely devoid of market facilities.

Commodities entering the Tribal markets.

Not only are the markets few in number and simple in appearance but the commodities sold and bought by the aboriginals are also limited in number and variety. Baigas bring forest produce for sale namely fruits, roots, tubers, stems, leaves, fibres, honey, wax, lac, animal products, bamboo work, etc.., etc. Since the forest tribe is at a very low technological level, most of these commodities are brought in their natural form except the bamboo work. They are collected by individuals in small quantities to be sold in the nearest village market. The local flora and fauna are thus fully reflected in Baiga's sales. His purchases are similarly simple and few in number. Baiga's social life and economic resources have standardised his pattern of living. Therefore, his demand schedule can almost be predicted. The quantity, quality and time of his purchases are known in advance to the shop-keepers. Salt before the rains set in, cloth in marriage season and decoration articles at the time of Dussehra festival—are common talk of the market. The system of money wages in forest work, no doubt, interferes with the usual practice of purchases. Still the basic pattern of purchases remains unchanged, particularly in the interior. The following list of Baiga's sales and purchases gives a rough idea of his exchange activities :

ARTICLES SOLD AND PURCHASED BY BAIGAS IN WEEKLY MARKETS.

Articles sold by the Baiga	Articles purchased by the Baiga
Agricultural Products.	1. Salt
1. Rai	2. Cloth
2. Jagni	3. Edible Oil
3. Wheat	4. Kerosene Oil
4. Rice	5. Chillies
Edibles.	6. Haldi
	7. Ready made cloth
1. Char	8. Combs
2. Aonla	9. Beads
3. Apta	10. Bangles (glass)
4. Bael	11. Bangles (Metal)
5. Bans	12. Anklets
6. Ber	13. Twine coloured
7. Dokarbel	14. Coconut
8. Ghoga	15. Biris
9. Imli	16. Tobacco
10. Iruni	17. Earthenware
11. Jamun	18. Tobacco Pouches
12. Jaria Ber	19. Plough shares
13. Kala Phetra	20. Arrowpoints
14. Karonda	21. Brass Waterpot
15. Kawit	22. Kerosene Oil Lamps

Articles sold by the Baiga	Articles purchased by the Baiga
16. Kulu	23. Small Tin Boxes
17. Kurum	24. Blankets (country made)
18. Kusum	25. Liquor
19. Mahua	26. Axes
20. Kachnar	27. Khanta
21. Amta	28. Thorn-picker
22. Khatua	29. Bhala
23. Koilar	
24. Datranga	
25. Baichandi	
26. Gumchi	
27. Musalkanda	
28. Satawari	
29. Tikhur	
30. Honey	
31. Mahul	
Bamboos and Grass, Fibres and Barks.	
1. Bans	
2. Katangbans	
3. Khas	
4. Rusa	
5. Mahalyan	
6. Amta	
7. Dhaman	
8. Semal	
9. Rohan	
10. Nasbel	
11. Chamari	
12. Kulu.	

Articles sold by the Baiga

Gums and Resins.

1. Babul
2. Dhaora
3. Gugal
4. Khair
5. Kulu
6. Rohan
7. Saj
8. Tinsa
9. Palas
10. Bija
11. Sal
12. Salai
13. Lac
14. Wax.

Herbs.

1. Akol
2. Amaltas
3. Anantmul
4. Arjun
5. Bharati
6. Bhilma
7. Bharra
8. Bijnori
9. Chiretta
10. Daruhaldi
11. Dokerbel
12. Dosli
13. Dudhi
14. Garari
15. Ghogar

Articles sold by the Baigas

16. Gokru
17. Gumchi
18. Harra
19. Indra Java
20. Indravan
21. Jamrasi
22. Kakai
23. Kali Musli
24. Kamraj
25. Khair
26. Kuchla
27. Kumbhi
28. Mainphal
29. Medsingh
30. Munga
31. Safed Musli
32. Sinduri
33. Tondru
34. Waghoti
35. Yelati

Weights and Measures

Chaotic conditions prevail with regard to weights and measures used in the Baiga land. Weights differ not only from place to place but within the same locality according to the grains weighed. In Mandla the ordinary measures are the Kuru (five seers or a little more than ten pounds) and the Khandi which is twenty Kurus or one hundred seers. The table of weights is as follows :

40 tolas make 1 paili
2 pailies make 1 Seer
5 Seers make 1 Kuru
20 Kurus make 1 Khandi

In Niwari and Pindrai side the Kuru contains 12 pailies or six seers, and is known as Barha. Another word for paili is barhaya, and a quarter of a paili (10 tolas) is called Chaholi. In measuring grain, not weights but measures are used and a Kuru measure filled with one grain will vary considerably from one of another grain. A Kuru of wheat weighs 4 Seers 14 Chattaks, rice weighs 5 Seers 1 Chattak, til 3 Seers 12 Chattaks, Jagni Seers 11 Chattaks, gram 4 Seers 13 Chattaks and masur 4 Seers 11 Chattaks.

In Baihar the Pao or barhiya contains 25 tolas of wheat, and a paili contains 100 tolas or 1¼ Seers. A Kuru consists of 5 such Pailies or 6¼ Seers. Twenty Kuros make a Khandi. In Baihar there are Kuros in use containing widely discripant quantities of wheat is 6 Seers 2 Chattaks and 6 Seers 12 Chattaks. The following statement exhibits the weight of different kinds of grain contained in each of the Kuros in ordinary use in Baihar :—

CAPACITY OF KURO FOR VARIOUS GRAINS IN BAIHAR.

Description of Grain	Weight of grain per Kuro				Weight in Seers of Bhatia or local Khandi (20 Kuros)	
	Lambari Kuro		Bhatia Kuro			
	Srs.	Ch.	Srs.	Ch.	Srs.	Ch.
Rice, unhusked ...	7	6½	5	7½	109	6
Rice, husked ...	9	9	6	6½	128	2
Wheat ...	10	1	7	5	146	4
Kodon, unhusked ...	7	9	5	7	108	12
Grain ...	10	3	7	6	147	8
Tur ...	9	10½	6	9½	132	7

In Mungeli tehsil of Bilaspur district the following scale of measures is employed in grain transactions :—

1 Chauthia = 18¼ Chattaks
1 Katha = 4 Chauthias (9¼ lbs.)
1 Khandi = 20 Kathas (2¼ maunds)
1 Gara = 20 Khandis.

The wages of farm servants and village servants are paid by a smaller measure, known as the Chaltu or Bhutia Katha which has a capacity of 2 Seers 4½ Chattaks or half the ordinary one.

In Mandla the measure of length is the Kos, which is approximately three miles and anything varying from a mile to mile and a half is known as Dhab or Dhap. Another measure of distance is the Hak or 'Shout' which means the distance which a human shout will carry, generally about half a mile. The villagers talk of *ek har ka* zamin or a plough of land, meaning any area from 6 to 20 acres. The Gondi Kos contains 2½ to 3 miles in Bilaspur and the Government Kos of two miles is known as the Sarkari Kos. A measure of depth of water is the *purush* or fathom, being the height a man can reach with his hands along his head. For each work, the Pasori of 5 *haths* long by five *haths* (hands) wide by a munda hath (from elbow to Knuckles deep) is the regular unit : it may be taken as equivalent to 72 cubic feet.*

TRANSPORT IN BAIGA LAND

Transport in hills is an uphill task. The Baiga land is a hilly tract—a long stretch of peaks, hillocks, ridges, ravines and valleys. Construction of roads or rail track is a difficult and expensive proposition. Heavy and continuous rains further convert even good roads into good-weather roads. Swift streams and inundations wash off not only the road surface but bridges and culverts too. As a result, repair and re-construction work involves heavy expenditure every year. The rains obstruct traffic not only on the pucca roads, but foot-paths are also rendered useless. Inter-village walking is stopped and vast tracts are completely isolated for weeks together. Aboriginals are often seen walking on stilts from one village to another avoiding the sticking mud. Besides, climatic and topographical conditions, sparse population and undeveloped state of the Baiga land are also responsible for the slow development of transport in the tract. Generally density of population provides the strongest spur to transport development. It necessitates expansion of exchange transactions, imports and exports. As a result, transport extends on its on account. But the Baiga land has a very sparse population. The density of population is as low as 91 persons per square mile in the Dindori tehsil where Baigas are mainly concentrated. It falls further to 80 in Saletekri in Baihar tehsil. There are hardly any organised large scale industries in the tract. Even cottage industries are geared to self-sufficiency. The trade mainly consists of collection and export of agricultural and forest commodities on indigenous lines, and retail sale of cloth and grocery. The aboriginals who form 60 per

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***District Gazetteers of Mandla, Balaghat and Bilaspur.**

cent of the general population in the Mandla district are highly immobile and move out only in times of crisis like famine or disease. Thus physical and social factors have slowed down the development of transport and means of communication in the Baiga land.

In recent times, however, certain forces have overcome the above factors. As a result of increase in demand for sleepers for railways and timber for construction work, Government have reserved the forests for commercial exploitation. Besides, minor forest produce like lac, tanning materials, tendu leaves and charcoal are in great demand in the urban areas. Therefore, more roads have been constructed by the Public Works and the Forest Departments to make forests accessible. Forest contractors have also helped this development in a way. Their motor trucks pass through forests and thus make tracks which are later on used as footpaths or bullock cart tracks by the aboriginals. At times they construct temporary bridges and culverts on their own initiative. Administrative reasons have also prompted the Government to open up the interior of hilly areas. The police and revenue work in these tracts was impossible without means of communication. Similarly, enforcement of Excise rules necessitated better means of transport. In recent years, however, schemes have been prompted by a desire to improve the lot of the aboriginal people. The Government realised that in any scheme of tribal welfare development of means of communication and transport should receive the topmost priority.*

But the impact of modern forces on transport system of the aboriginal areas is yet to be felt. The tribal welfare schemes of the Madhya Pradesh Government have not achieved much in this direction as far as the Baiga land is concerned. The following table shows what was done upto 1951 :

Roads constructed under the Tribal Welfare Scheme in Mandla District upto 1951.

Serial Order	From	To	Length in miles
1.	Tatri	Bargi	2¾
2.	Hatitara	Satpahari	2¼
3.	Bicchia	Simaria	2
		Total	7 miles.

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* See Pandit Nehru's speech to First Tribal Welfare Conference held in Delhi in June 1952 (Government Brochure on the Conference) and Five Year Plan of Tribal Welfare for Madhya Pradesh prepared by Thakkar Bapa.

Railway Transport in Baiga Land.

The poignancy of slow speed of development becomes still clear when the existing backwardness of transport is taken into consideration. Let us first review the conditions with regard to railway transport in the tract. The Baiga land is very poor in railway communication. A narrow gauge line passes through the extreme borders of the Mandla district joining Nainpur and Pindrai, from the former of which a branch was constructed in 1909, linking Nainpur with Maharajpur, a suburb of Mandla. The total mileage in the district is about 40, and the number of Stations six. A few miles beyond the north-east border of the Mandla district runs the Katni-Bilaspur Section of the old border and much of the produce of the district finds its way across the Vindhya Pradesh border to Birsingpur Station from where it is carried by rail to Katni and Jubbulpore. On the South-east border Bilaspur is linked by rail with Anuppur. But the latter two sections do not pass through the Baiga land proper. The Baiga land is stretched over Mandla district, Baihar tehsil and Mungeli tehsil. In this tract the total mileage of railway is only 40. The following table shows the implications of inadequate railway transport in the Baiga land :—

Railway Transport in Baiga Land :

Total Railway Mileage	40
Total Population	931625
Total number of Villages	3436
Total Area	8064 Sq. miles.
Railway Transport per head.	2.7 inches
Number of villages served by a mile of railway	8.6
Porportion of rail mileage to area	8.7 yds. per sq. mile

The reasons for this state of affairs are not far to seek. Topographical conditions of the tract have rendered railway construction a costly proposition. In the absence of sufficient passenger and goods traffic, capital invested in rail transport can not bring good return for a long time. Moreover, the main railway lines linking the north with the southern peninsula of India pass through the borders of the Baiga land. As a result, the Baiga land has remained a kind of island without railway transport. The Railway planners have never felt it necessary to intersect the tract. As far as the aboriginal population is concerned, it is not even aware of the advantages of rail transport. The tribals seldom feel the necessity of using the railway service. Their movement is generally within a radius of 25 miles which they are able to cover on foot. Salt and cloth are available to them in the weekly markets. In olden days cloth was supplied by the Pankas and salt was brought on pack animals by the Banjaras and other pedlars. The modern railway transport was thus and is still 'alien' to some extent in the aboriginal areas. This is why the majority of the Baiga, as our enquiries showed has not seen the railway train. In the interior parts like the Baiga Chak, Kawardha and Mungeli tehsils and the Motinala Range there are hardly two or three Baigas in a village who have done any railway travelling. However, they are not so much ignorant about roads and motor transport. For roads are now penetrating into the interior parts of the Baiga land. The following table shows the roads maintained by the Public Works Depaitment or Janapads in the tract :

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* 'Andhkar Se Prakash ki Aur', (Publication of the Tribal Welfare Department, M. P. Government), p. 60.

Name of Road	Length (in miles)	Under Class I	Under Class II	Under Class III	Remarks
Dindori-Amarkantak	49	27	22		P.W.D.
Mandla-Dindori	64				- do—
Seori-Bajag	13			13	Janapad
Mandla-Bilaspur	138	60	8	70	P.W.D.
Hirdenagar-Ghogri	15		15	9	Janapad
Sikka-Amarpur	9			52	—do—
Bicchia-Dindori	52			24	P.W.D.
Bicchia-Mawai	24				—do—
Baihar-Supkhar	32	32			—do—
Total carried over	396	119	45	168	

Name of Road	Length (in miles)	Under Class I	Under Class II	Under Class III	Remarks
Total brought forward	396	119	45	168	
Baihar-Saletkri	34		34		Janapad
Baihar-Chandia	13		13		—do—
Silhati-Kawardha	20		20		Transferred
Kawardha-Pandaria	22		22		P.W.D.
Pandaria-Kota	40		40		—do—
Pandari-Mungeli	22		22		- do—
Mungeli-Lormi	15			15	Janapad
Sakri-Kota	13		13		P.W.D.
Bilaspur Katghora	51	18	33		—do—
Total ...	626	137	242	183	

Note :—Class II and III are not motorable during the rainy season.

The total length of all types of roads in the Baiga land is 626 miles, of which 425 miles are under class two and three. It may be noted that these 425 miles of road (68 per cent of the total length) are not motorable during the rainy season, which lasts over three months in aboriginal tracts The condition of roads under class three is still worse not only during the rainy season but also two months after it till repairs are completed. Baigas are mainly concentrated in the Southern side of Dindori where inadequacy of road transport is further proved by the following table which deals with the contiguous areas of Dindori and Baihar tehsils :—

ROAD TRANSPORT IN DINDORI & BAIHAR TEHSILS.

Total Road Mileage	428 miles
Total Population	267244
Total Area	3077
Total number of villages	1032
Roads per head	2.8 yds.
Roads per sq. mile of area	244 yds.
Number of villages served by a mile of road.	2.4

As will be seen from the above table the length of road per head in Dindori and Baihar tehsils is only 2.8 yds; and the proportion of roads to the area is 244 yds. per square mile. A road mile serves 2.4 villages in the tract. The road map of Madhya Pradesh will show that the vast tract of the Baiga land is without roads and the entire population has to use only foot tracks marked by Banjara's pack-animals. Irregular topography, dense forests, isolation and sparse population are responsible for the slow development of road transport in the Baiga land. Consequently the Baiga villages except near the roads depend on simple village tracts.

Mandla district possesses very few Kaccha village roads so common in other districts. Rough pathways have been made by hosts of wandering Banias, Telis and Banjaras, with their pack-bullocks. These tracks are little more than an indication of the way, a narrow ribbon of dust, a foot in width, winding over hill and down dale through cultivated plains or gloomy forests. In the rains when the dust of the tracks is converted into mud, inter-village communications are practically cut-off. The children use stilts (known as *giri*) which raise the user above the mud. But generally inter-village foot tracks are closed during the rains, and Baigas move out only when compelled by some urgent matter.

Basic Considerations about Transport in Baiga Land

The above discussion about transport system of the Baiga land leads us to certain conclusions : (i) Transport facilities are awfully inadequate in the tract, (ii) the pace of development of rail and road transport has been very slow, (iii) the existing routes are serving the interests of administration and traders more than of the aboriginal population, (iv) and the tribals are indifferent towards 'the opening up of the area, in particular the Baiga avoid living near roads. The situation, therefore, demands a new approach to the problem of transport in the aboriginal areas. The details of transport schemes are the concern of the expert. However, certain basic factors deserve our consideration.

(a) The main factors which governed the development of transport in tribal tracts in the past were convenience of administration and commercial exploitation of forests. The needs and interests of aboriginal population were given very meagre importance. In future this policy must be changed and a balance should be struck between the interests of tribals and non-tribals. Roads which are likely to serve the local population for example, inter-village communications should receive priority at the hands of Government and local administration.

(b) The emphasis should, in future. be on roads which are used by bullock-carts, pack-animals and runners so that local transport industry may develop as vital part of the forest economy. Wherever possible, the contractors should be advised to encourage bullock-cart transport and the Forest Department officials should be instructed to use bullock-cart and pack-animals for departmental work. The wood cut for making bullock-carts should be included in the list of *nistar* concessions permitted for bonafide agricultural purpose.

(c) Transport is least developed in southern part of the Baiga land. Therefoore, steps should be taken to link it with other parts of the region.

(d) In many cases isolation of villages during the rainy season can be broken if small bridges, raised causeways, flush causeways or dips are made at suitable points. Baigas already know the technique, they are only to be enthused and organised for collective work.

(e) At present, the general practice is to give contract of road construction to an outsider who deputes his agents imported from urban centres. This creates an 'alien' atmosphere in road work camps, and brings aboriginals into contact of degraded type of persons. In order to avoid this evil and to gain tribals' confidence efforts should be made to utilise the aboriginal's talent, traditional skill, supervising capacity and knowledge of local geography. In initial stages the Baiga worker may not be found upto the required standard. But once their confidence is gained they are sure to prove skilful road workers, at least in inter-village communications.

CHAPTER IX(A)

SOURCES AND PATTERN OF INCOME

Baigas are a forest tribe. Cultivation and forest work are their main sources of income. But they are exposed to the vagaries of nature. Drought and floods are reflected in Baiga's agricultural yield; while forest work is irregular, intermittent and seasonal. Its volume partly depends upon the weather conditions, as will be seen later, and partly upon the policies of administration. Thus a Baiga's income is determined by natural conditions, seasonal changes, nature and scope of Governmental activities in the forest areas and to some extent nearness of villages in plains or weekly markets. The last two factors decide the existence of opportunity of selling certain forest produce at irregular periods. A detailed analysis of various sources of income reveals the main characteristics of his income.

Cultivation and Bewar

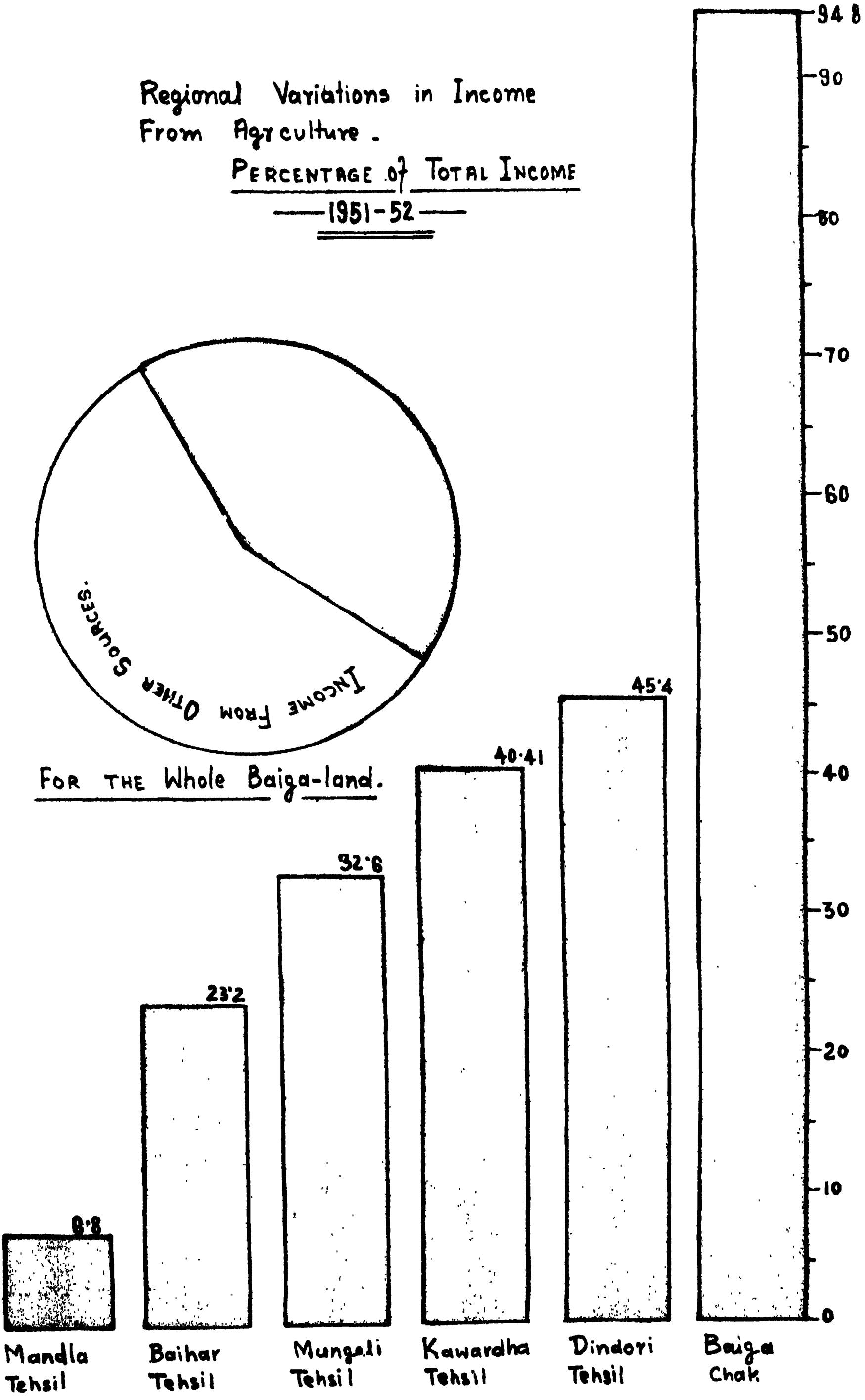
Cultivation and Bewar are important sources of income, though more or less next to forest and road work, in the Baiga land. The Baiga attaches greater importance to it than to the forest work. Since cultivation supplies food and work to other members of his family he considers it more stable, dependable and regular than the forest work. Relatively speaking income from cultivation is definitely more regular, as the organisation and scale of farming are within the capacity of the cultivator; while in the case of the forest work, the decisions of the Forest Department determine the duration and volume of work and consequently the income of the forest worker. However, it may be noted that agricultural income in the aboriginal areas, particularly in the Baiga land is not so secure. The Baiga technique of agriculture is of crudest type, his crops are solely dependent on monsoons, and modern scientific methods of protecting crops against nature's whims, and depredations by insects, pests and wild animals, are not known to the Baiga. It is, therefore, not surprising to see a Baiga propitiating gods with chicken and liquor to save his crops from the wrath of evil spirits. Again, agricultural yield to a very great extent depends upon the soil conditions. Unfortunately soil in the Baiga land (being barra type) is the poorest, and there is not sufficient cultivable area in the valleys to permit long fallows. The operation of adverse factors is keeping Baiga's income low and uncertain.

A survey of 350 Baiga families revealed certain facts about their income from different sources. Some factors have, however, to be kept in view while considering the income statistics of the Baiga. The year in which the survey was undertaken was a period of bad crops. Due to poor rains, farmers could not reap even an average harvest. Secondly, Baigas were reluctant to disclose their real agricultural production lest the Government might seize it under the procurement system or there may be enhancement of land revenue. Thirdly the Baiga being illiterate and ignorant of weights and measures, could not give an exact quantitative estimate of their yields. These factors had definitely influenced the data of Baiga's income. Therefore due weightage has been given to them while analysing the over-all economic position of the families.

The *total income* of 350 families from cultivation was found to be Rs. 45,532/-. Thus a family, generally speaking, earned during the year under review, an *average income* of Rs. 130/ (round figures taken) from agriculture or nearly Rs. 11/- per month. The average size of a Baiga family being 6 the per capita income from agriculture comes to Rs. 20/12/- approximately. In terms of percentages, income from cultivation and bewar is 42.6 of the total income of the Baiga family. However, there are variations in the agricultural income earned in different regions of the Baiga land. The following table makes the position more vivid.

REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN INCOME FROM AGRICULTURE
YEAR 1951-52.

Region	Number of families surveyed.	Total Income.	Income from Agri-culture.	Percentage of the total Income
		Rs.	Rs.	
Baiga Chak ...	91	24,869	23,574	94.8
Dindori Tehsil ...	57	13,402	6,090	45.4
Mandla Tehsil ...	68	24,996	1,695	6.8
Mungeli Tehsil ...	52	16,806	5,481	32.6
Kawardha Tehsil ..	27	7,754	3,134	40.41
Baihar Tehsil ...	55	19,059	5,556	29.2
For whole Baiga land ...	350	1,06,890	45,532	42.6



Regional Variations in Income From Agriculture.

PERCENTAGE of TOTAL INCOME

—1951-52—

FOR THE Whole Baiga-land.

The percentage of income from agriculture is the highest in the Baiga Chak. Here 94.8 per cent of the total income is derived from cultivation. The reason is clear. Baiga Chak is in the interior most part of the region. It is almost cut off from the outside world. Since forests are not exploited commercially nor is there any demand for forest produce because of the distance of weekly markets and big villages, the population has no other source of income except cultivation —both with plough and bewar. The percentage of agricultural income declines in the more open areas, that is, the Dindori and Kawardha tehsil. In Mungeli tehsil the percentage goes down to 32.6, not because of isolation but due to rocky land in the Northern portion. A new road is being constructed in the area which attracts aboriginal labour from distant villages. In Baihar tehsil, Baigas derive only 29.2 per cent of their total income from agriculture. In this part, Forest Department provides sufficient work to the aboriginals. There is a Government Saw Mill at Mukki ; Garhi is a Range Officer's headquarter, and at Supkhar a Deputy Ranger is stationed to supervise the nursery. North Motinala Range provides both forest and road work. The percentage of income from agriculture is exceptionally low in the Baiga villages of the Mandla tehsil. Mandla forests, it may be noted, have been subjected to commercial exploitation for long. Transport system also is more developed in this area. Forest contractors have spread their work throughout the region. Baigas of Mandla tehsil have, therefore, more opportunities of getting work under the Forest Department and the forest contractors. The regional variations in aboriginal's income from agriculture prove : the greater the isolation of an area, the greater the dependence on agriculture and higher the percentage of income derived from agriculture.

Forest Work and Road Labour

Forest work and road labour are the most important sources of income among the Baiga. With the expansion of departmental working and increased commercial exploitation of forests employment opportunities have expanded in the forest areas. As a result of the opening up of areas with all-weather and fair-weather roads, motor transport has penetrated into some of the deepest forest pockets. Although the income from forest labour is more than from cultivation, it is irregular in respect of time as well as amount. In villages near the forest or P.W.D. roads, aboriginals get work on an average from 3 to 4 months in a year. Forest villages provide more work in a year. But even here during the rainy season or when the Forest Department goes slow in executing its working plans, employment opportunities diminish. In Ryotwari and

Malguzari villages, however, aboriginals concentrate more on cultivation than on forest work.

The volume of forest employment thus largely depends upon development of transport, the extent to which the forests are commercially exploited, scope and execution of working plans of the Forest Department and the road plans executed in the area. All these factors introduce an element of uncertainty and irregularity in the income derived from forest and road work. Besides, forest work is not available in every aboriginal village. Where the village is situated far away from the road, or in an area where the forest is neither worked departmentally nor by contractors, forest work is almost negligible. For example, Baigas in the Baiga Chak derive only about 3.94 per cent of their total income from forest and road work. The seasonal changes also render this source uncertain. Heavy and prolonged monsoons on the one hand may prolong the period of stoppage of work, but on the other, necessitate increased repair work on forest roads and culverts. Forest work no doubt expands employment opportunities and adds to the income of the aboriginal, but it also produces certain adverse effects on his total annual income. When a road is to be constructed or repaired far away from the village or the forest contractor is having his operations in a distant place, the aboriginals have either to leave their families at home and go single or they have to take their families and necessary provisions with them. This temporary migration involves some extra expenditure or interruption in their agricultural operations and the collection of fruits and roots. Again, the method and time of payment of forest wages do not leave a good effect upon the income of the Baiga. It was noticed (and many Baigas complained) that where a road was constructed or repaired near the villages, a lump sum was paid by way of wages to the villagers near which the work was done and the whole working population was required to work on the road. This is a sort of contract system. It does not take into account the amount of work, the number of labourers engaged, their working hours and the rate of wages. The system also leaves enough scope for corruption by the sub-ordinate staff of the Forest or Public Works Department. Consequently, the aboriginal labourer is not able to get the amount of wages to which he is entitled under Government rules or warranted by the amount of his labour. Moreover, payment of wages in cash and in lump sum at irregular periods at some places encourages extravagance among aboriginals. On wage payment days aboriginals indulge in excessive drink or are robbed off their income by the Sahukars or pedlers.

It is notable that though forest and road work bring considerable income to the aboriginal, certain forces make inroads into this source.

Baigas, therefore, do not consider it a dependable source. Many of them complained that it was only to eke out their living that they performed this work, otherwise, they had no special liking for it. The administration, it is suggested, may take some measures to make this source of income more attractive and stable for a forest tribe like the Baiga. Steps may be taken to enforce a minimum wage for forest workers payable by the Forest Department and the forest contractors. In order to ensure proper treatment of forest labour, departmental working of forests should be expanded further.

The rates of wages for forest or road work are not uniform in the Baiga region. It appears they are decided upon from time to time by the officers at District headquarters. Availability of labour, agricultural conditions prevailing at the time in an area, intensity of forest work under the Department and the forest contractors and the extent to which a regular labour force has been built up—all influence the rate of wages in a particular area. Since the local authority are empowered with discretionary powers, individual decisions further cause differentiations. The enquiries, however, disclosed the following schedule of rates of wages paid by the Forest Department, varying from region to region :—

Class of worker	*Rate of wages per day*
Male adult worker	... Between Rs. 0-10-0 and Rs. 0-12-0
Female adult worker	... Between Rs. 0- 6-0 and Rs. 0- 8-0
Child below 15	... Between Rs. 0- 3-0 and Rs. 0- 5-0

The total income of 350 families from forest work and road labour according to the survey was Rs. 47,900/10/. Thus the average income of a family from this source comes to about Rs. 136/13/0 or Rs. 11/5/- per month per family. Dividing it by the total number of persons surveyed, the per capita income from this source comes to Rs. 21/6/0. Baigas derive nearly 44.8 per cent of their income from forest work and road labour. The diagram shows the relative position of forest work and road labour among other sources of income of the Baiga.

However, the income from forest and road work is not uniform in all parts of the Baiga land. There are regional variations in it. As stated earlier, development of transport and the extent of commercial utilisation of forests influence Baiga's income from forest and road work. Therefore, in the more opened up areas like Mandla, Baihar and the northern part of the Kawardha tehsil the percentage of income derived from forest is sufficiently high i.e., 68.8, 63.4 and 54.9 respectively. In the Baiga villages of Mungeli tehsil also the percentage is as high as 63.4, although the area is comparatively less developed. A new road is being constructed at present through the Baiga villages which offers employment in road construction. But with the exception of Mungeli tehsil, the inference that opening up of forest areas expands non-agricultural employment, stands true. For in the Baiga Chak and the Baiga villages of Dindori tehsil, where means of communication and transport are least developed the percentage of income from forest work and road labour falls as low as 3.94 and 20.4 respectively. These regional variations not only explain the working of certain forces, but also indicate the necessity of making provision of schemes for developing forest work in any plan of aboriginal's development. In the Baiga Chak particularly the need for the diversification of employment is urgent for here Baigas earn 95 per cent of their total income from precarious agriculture. The following table shows the regional variations in the income derived from forest work and road labour :

REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN INCOME FROM FOREST AND ROAD WORK

(1951-52)

Region	Number of families surveyed	Total Income	Income from Forest & Road Work	Percentage of total Income
		Rs.	Rs.	
Baiga Chak ...	91	24,869	979	3.94
Dindori Tehsil ...	57	13,402	2,728	20.4
Mandla Tehsil ...	68	24,996	17,185	68.8
Mungeli Tehsil ...	52	16,806	10,659	63.4
Kawardha Tehsil ...	27	7,754	4,261	54.9
Baihar Tehsil ...	55	19,059	12,086	63.4
For the whole Region	350	1,06,890	47,900	44.8

Collection of Forest Produce and Hunting and Fishing

Baigas were originally fruit gatherers and wild hunters. With the passage of time the majority of them has now accepted plough cultivation and casual forest work. But the old tradition is not dead altogether. Baigas earn even now a part of their livelihood by collecting and selling forest produce - fruits, roots, tubers, leaves, fuel, fibres, bamboos, honey, wax, lac, resin, gum, etc. Although they do not earn anything by way of hunting, yet they do add to their diet some non-vegetarian articles. Usually the women collect roots and fruits, but men folk go to sell them in the mixed villages or weekly markets. In some villages women sell plaster clays in the near about villages. Fishing is done mostly for domestic consumption and not for sale.

The income from the sale of forest produce and hunting and fishing is third in order of importance. But the source is of a seasonal nature. For supply of forest produce depends upon their seasonal availability. Secondly, the nature and density of forests around the village determines the kind and quantity of produce which can be collected and sold for money. For example Mohlayan—a fibrous creeper—if available in the neighbourhood of a village, can bring regular income to the aboriginals. Or Chironji or *tendu* leaves can be a good source of income for the whole Baiga family. Thirdly, nearness of a market or a big village affects the sale of forest produce and, therefore, income of the primitive. Baiga villages like Basania, Ufri, Hadi, and Kasai Kunda near the weekly markets, have more opportunity of earning by selling forest produce in the weekly markets, while Baigas of Indri, Kanha or Sonph in the Bamni Range have little chance of effecting regular sale of their forest produce. In such villages, therefore, forest produce is mainly collected for domestic consumption and not for sale. It is difficult to calculate their price as they do not possess any market value in isolated villages. Fourthly, the income which a family can derive from this source depends upon the number of persons who can collect produce from the forest and the amount of time which women get after finishing domestic work. Fifthly, the nature of the village—whether forest village or ryotwari village—also determines the opportunities and rights of collecting forest produce. In forest villages the villagers have greater facilities and privileges compared to the residents of ryotwari villages. Besides, general treatment of the subordinate staff of the Forest Department and the degree of strictness with which forest rules are enforced decide a great deal about the aboriginal's courage to collect produce from the Government forests. Sixthly, condition of season also determines the opportunity for collecting fruits and roots. Continuous and heavy rains obstruct wanderings in forests and also render weekly markets inaccessible. Consequently both collection and sale of forest produce decline in this period. Similarly in summer there is a diminution in the supply of fruits and roots.

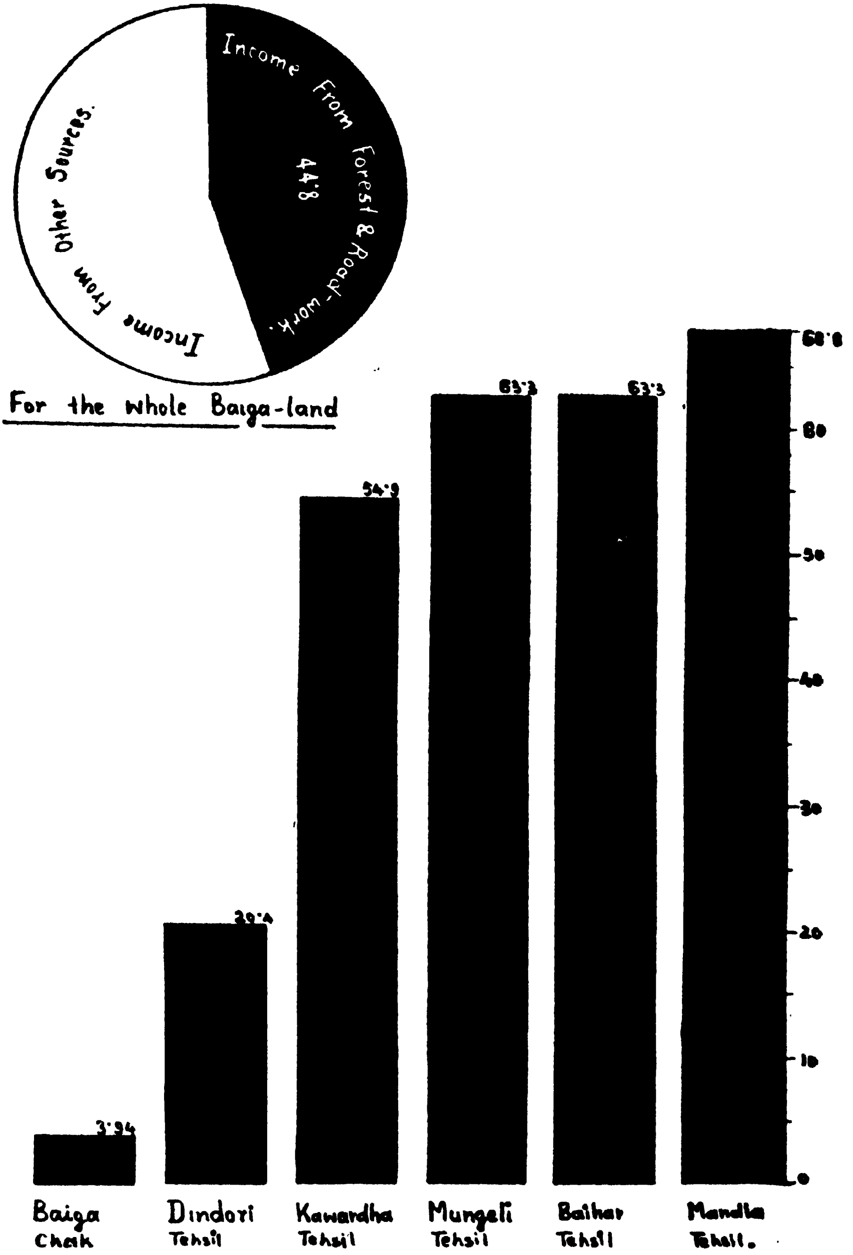
Baigas exchange their forest produce partly for cash and partly for grain. When they sell it directly in the weekly market or in the market of some big village, payment is usually made in cash. But where the sales are effected in the Gond villages nearabout, a Baiga barters away his produce with grain, not unoften coarse grains, Kodon and Kutki. Usually he gets 1 to 2 seers of grain per barter transaction or 3 to 4 annas in case of cash sale. The number of sales made by a family during the year depends upon the factors enumerated above.

According to our survey the total income earned by 350 Baiga families from the sale of forest produce and hunting and fishing was Rs. 9,120/13/- that is on an average a Baiga family earned nearly Rs. 26/- annually from this source, or Rs. 4/2/- per head. The importance of forest produce and hunting as a source of income varies in accordance with the working of various factors which influence the demand for the produce in the neighbouring areas. In the Baiga Chak where the villages are far away from weekly markets and the mixed villages in the Chak are less in number, Baigas earn only .03 per cent of their income by selling forest produce. Baigas of Biahar tehsil where markets are more accessible, could earn more from this source, but they find it more profitable to do work under the Forest Department or Forest contractors. The villages of Mungeli and Kawardha tehsil conform to the general rule that the lesser the opportunity of selling forest produce, the lower the income from this source. For in these areas the percentages of income from this source are 2.3 and 4.3 respectively. Baigas of Dindori tehsil were found earning 27.8 per cent of the total income from forest produce. In this tract the number of mixed villages is large and some Baiga villages are situated near the market place. Unlike Baihar and Mandla, forest work and road construction provide less employment in the Dindori tract. In the Mandla tehsil, where the selling opportunities are greatest due to a developed system of transport, the percentage of income from forest produce recedes to 18. It appears, upto a certain stage the Baigas find it profitable to sell forest produce, but beyond this stage forest and road work begin to compete with the selling of forest produce. And slowly forest work (Bani Mazoori) takes the place of Kanda Koosa (collection of roots and tubers). The tendency is perceptible in the Baihar tehsil most where forest work has been developed to a great extent.

The following table exhibits the regional variations in income from sale of forest produce and hunting and fishing:—

REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN INCOME FROM FOREST & ROAD-WORK.

(Percentage of total-Income) (1951-52)



REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN INCOME FROM THE SALE OF FOREST PRODUCE AND HUNTING (1951-52)

Region	Total income	Income frum Forest produce and Hunting	Percentage of the total Income
	Rs.	Rs.	
Baiga Chak	24,869	8	0.03
Dindori tehsil	13,402	3,723	27.8
Mandla tehsil	24,996	4,511	18.0
Mungeli tehsil	16,806	384	2.3
Kawardha tehsil	7,754	329	4.3
Baihar tehsil	19,059	164	0.8
For whole Baiga land	1,06,890	9,120	8.6

Magic and Disease Cure

Baigas enjoy great reputation as sorcerers and medicinemen in the tribal areas. They are the priests and wizards of the Gonds and to some extent also of the Hindus. Though the practice is now falling into disuse, almost every village or group of villages in the Mandla District, whether Hindu or aboriginal, at one time had, and most still have, a Baiga priest.* His duties are somewhat indefinite, covering practically every aspect of life. The primary duty of the Baiga magician is to diagnose the causes of disease and defeat them. 'He must stimulate the growth of crops and protect them from hail, storm and jungle pig; he must keep cows from straying; he must direct the arrow to its mark; he must lay the ghost of the dead; shut the mouth of the tiger; protect from snake and scorpian.'† The Baiga sorcerer is famous for the magic of love. Knowledge of the most efficacious love-magic is, however, confined to the chief Gunia. He is supposed to exercise control over the weather. He can make and stop rains, drive away hail or ward off storm. Through magic the Baiga constructs Mero (an imaginary

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See Mandla District Gazetteer, p. 73.

For the technique & psychological and mythical aspect of the Baiga magic see Elwin, Op. cit. p. 338-407.

village boundary) to keep off wild animals from the village. During dance and marriage he controls hostile and evil spirits. According to Baigas disease has its origin either in witchcraft or in the spontaneous and inexplicable hostility of unseen beings. In most of the cases, therefore, a Gunia's services are utilised in curing disease. If the village is afflicted with any epidemic, the Gunia is called to make offerings to the god concerned and drive the disease out of the village boundary. The Baiga is a deadly enemy of Bhut* and Churalin.† Many charms are used for prophylactic magic. Gunia is considered the wise man of the village and knows medicinal prescriptions for many diseases.

Sorcery, however, (known as *gunyayi* among the tribals) brings income to a very few. Every Baiga is not a magician as is generally supposed or depicted in the writings of officials and non-officials. Hardly 5 to 7 per cent know magic or *jhara phooki*. To be a Gunia one must know and memorise hundreds of mantras and legends. The thread of gunia-ship is carried on from father to son. And in some cases the father may not disclose the secrets of the magic to his own son. Then an aspirant for gunyayi must incur some expenditure on initiation and choosing a well-versed *gunia* as his *guru*. Since magic needs special skill, every Baiga cannot become a Gunia and make it a source of income. A small minority gets earning from it. But even these earnings are not in the form of cash. There are very few rituals or offerings in which cash presentation is made. The Baiga priest usually gets a bottle of liquor, a chicken, some grain or at the most a feast of goat or pig. Thus the income is in kind—mostly articles of diet. Each Gunia has jurisdiction for his work. The whole countryside is divided up into circuits and it is mutually agreed among the Gunias that they will not go into another's circuit. This arrangement further limits the income of the Gunia. Moreover, the kind and quantity of offerings to be made to the Gunia are prescribed by magic and custom. A delimited jurisdiction of operations and defined offerings impose certain limitations on income from the gunyayi. It is only the number of magic cases that can increase this income. But in recent times not only Baiga's magic has become a weak and beggarly thing, people in general are also losing faith in its efficacy and power. For example, many Baigas have given up the old rites connected with the cutting, firing and sowing of Bewars. The Laru Kaj is celebrated not so often as before. Love charms are not believed by the young. Consequently gunyayi is a dwindling source of income in Baiga economy. Above all, Baiga does not regard it as a means of income. It is not a profession but a promotional work in his life. He performs it more as a part of his *dharm** than as an occupation.

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* Ghost.

† Female evil spirit.

The total income derived from gunyayi by 350 families amounted to Rs. 1,506/8/- during the year of survey. Thus, on an average a family earned nearly Rs. 4/4/- per year from this source. On average a Gunia got Rs. 20/- to 30/- worth of liquor, grain, coconuts etc. Hardly 1.4 per cent of the total income is derived by Baiga families from magic and sorcery.

It is difficult to account for the regional variations in income from magic as complicated non-economic forces are influencing the source. The Gunia earn more in the Dindori and Mandla regions where 4.5 and 2.36 per cent of the total income is earned by sorcery. The reason appears to be the concentration of a large number of Baigas in this region who have still faith in gunyayi. Here they also get the opportunity of visiting mixed and predominently Gond villages. The most opened up area (Baihar) and the most isolated area (the Baiga Chak) record a very low percentage namely 0.8 and 0.31. It seems the hold of Baiga magic is loosening on the Baihar area due to culture-contact of the Binjhwar Baigas. In the Baiga Chak, the number of Gunias is small, for typical Baiga families left the Chak when other tribes were allowed to settle down in it. The following table exhibits the income earned from magic in different regions.

REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN INCOME FROM MAGIC AND SORCERY.
(1951-52.)

Region.	Total Income.	Income from magic and Sorcery.	Percentage of the total Income.
	Rs.	Rs.	
Baiga Chak ...	24,869	78	0.31
Dindori tehsil ...	13,402	615	4.5
Mandla tehsil ...	24,996	589	2.36
Mungeli tehsil ...	16,806	40	0.3
Kawardha tehsil ...	7,754	20	0.26
Baihar ...	19,059	163	0.8
For the whole Baiga land ...	1,06,890	1,506	1.4

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* Duty.

Cattle and Dairy Products

The Baiga do not breed cattle for sale nor for selling milk and milk products. Cattle are not so important in the Baiga economy as in ordinary agriculture. Moreover, Baiga reside on hill tops or in deep parts of the forest. where market for milk or milk products does not exist. Even the professional cattle breeder—namely Ahirs and Banjaras do not go to these places so often. Consequently there is no incentive to dairy industry in the Baiga villages. Baigas are, therefore, not so well versed in cattle breeding or dairy industry as other tribesmen, or caste cultivators. Their method of preparing ghee is very crude involving loss of fat contents. Milk yield is also very low in the Baiga region. A cow does not give more than ¾ seers of milk per day and a buffalo 2 seers per day. The breed is poor, fodder is of the coarsest type and the aboriginals are not in a position to feed them with nutritive diet. The Baiga simply laughed when questioned about the income they derived from dairy products. The sale of cattle brings no substantial income to them. Cattle markets or places of fairs are far away from the Baiga villages. Even hides or horns of the dead animal are not sold. The dead body is thrown away into the jungle. Since *chamars* are not available in the neighbourhood the carcass, bones and horns go waste. It is usual to observe rotten and waste dead bodies of cattle around the villages.

Cattle and dairy products thus bring very little income to the Baiga. Only 1.2 per cent of the total income is earned from this source. All the 350 families earned a total income of Rs. 1,305/- by selling dairy products. On an average a Baiga family got about Rs. 3/11 annually from this sale. The percentage from this source becomes quite clear from the following table :

INCOME FROM DAIRY PRODUCTS.

Region		Income	Percentage of total Income
		Rs.	
Baiga Chak	...	75	0.3
Dindori Tehsil	...	225	1.7
Mandla Tehsil	...	455	1.8
Mungeli Tehsil	...	165	0.9
Baihar Tehsil	..	385	2.0
For the whole Baiga land	..	1,305	1.2

There are regional variations in income from the sale of dairy products. In Baihar nearly 2 per cent of the income is contributed by this source, being the highest in the Baiga region. The Baiga villages of Baihar are comparatively more opened up. Roads have been developed connecting the Baiga villages with the main roads. Binjhwar Baigas of this area are more regular cultivators and have realised the importance of cattle in their agricultural economy. They have also learnt the art of breeding cattle and preparing milk products. Effects of these factors are perceptible in the Mandla and Dindori tehsils where the percentages of income from this source are 1.8 and 1.7 respectively. In some of the villages of these areas, Baigas have been influenced by Gond cultivators. But in the most 'backward' and predominently Baiga tract namely Baiga villages of Kawardha tehsil income from this source is nil. It is almost negligible in the Baiga Chak and Mungeli tehsil being 0.3 per cent and 0.9 per cent respectively. Regional variations in income indicate that conditions of transport and Gond influence affect the cattle and dairy industry to a very great extent. The greater the progress in these directions, the higher the income from dairy products. In any future scheme of cattle development, these factors will have to be met adequately along with improvement of breed and grazing facilities.

Subsidiary and miscellaneous occupations

This source includes basketry, other bamboo work, casual labour on farms, carting, making of stone grinding wheels, licensed distilling etc. Naturally all or any one of them is not carried on in all the villages or in the majority of villages. Subsidiary occupations largely depend upon local supply of raw materials, traditional skill and demand for a particular article in the neighhouring areas. Bamboo work is commonest of all. Baiga families prepare baskets, mats, *supa* etc. and sell them either in the neighbouring mixed villages for grain or go to the weekly markets and get cash in return. The details of the industry have been discussed earlier. However, it may be noted that bamboo work is also going out of Baiga's hands slowly and the income from this source is now on the decline.

Baigas generally do not work as farm labourers; partly because a good number of them is settled in forest villages and partly they live in isolation from the cultivating classes. Their social traditions and mythical beliefs also disapprove such work. Consequently very few Baigas, particularly in the Baiga area, earn from farm work. Carting and loading and unloading of logs, and work in the government saw mills is available only in the developed areas like the Baihar and Mandla tehsils. But the work is essentially of a seasonal character and the amount of income is dependent on the extent to which commercial exploitation of forests has been carried out. Two Baiga families—namely at Jalda and Dhurkatta are holding licence for outstill and make some income out of it. But such cases are exceptional.

The subsidiary and miscellaneous occupations contribute nearly 1.4 per cent to the total income. On an average a Baiga family earns about Rs. 4/5 per year from miscellaneous work—the total income of 350 families being Rs. 1,524/6. The source yields high income in the more developed areas, namely, Baihar and Mandla where the percentage is 3.8 and 2.23 respectively. In the Baiga Chak it is 0.18, Dindori 0.1, Mungeli 0.5 and Kawardha 0.13.

Total Income Regionwise

After making a detailed analysis of the various sources of income of the Baiga, let us now view the over-all income position of the tribesmen. The following table shows the total number of families surveyed, number of working adults in them and the total amount of income earned in different regions :—

TOTAL INCOME OF DIFFERENT REGIONS

Regions	Total Number of Families	Total Number of Persons	Number of working adults	Total Income		
				Rs.	As.	P.
Baiga Chak	91	658	343	24,869	9	0
Dindori Tehsil	57	333	226	13,402	13	0
Mandla Tehsil	68	458	270	24,996	14	0
Mungeli Tehsil	52	296	175	16,806	6	0
Kawardha Tehsil	27	114	77	7,754	15	0
Baihar Tehsil	55	333	207	19,059	8	0
Whole Baiga land	350	2,192	1,298	1,06,890	1	0

The total income of 350 Baiga families in all the regions was Rs. 1,06,890-1-0 from all the sources. It is difficult, it may be mentioned at the outset, to establish arithmetical accuracy in an enquiry about Baiga economy. For besides the intervention of many non-economic factors the aboriginals cannot describe the true state of affairs partly due to their ignorance and illiteracy and partly due to their fear of the 'civilised'. Until very recently only officials, and money-lenders and pedlers had been visiting the aboriginal tracts particularly the Baiga regions, either to recover land revenue, loan or to enquire into some offence. It is, therefore, an honest statement of facts that our statistical findings indicate only the trends and tendencies of the Baiga economy and no arithmetical accuracy is claimed for them.

Average Income per Family

The average annual income per Baiga family comes to about Rs. 305-6-0. Further analysis, however, discloses regional variations in the average income per family. It varies from Rs. 235/- in Dindori tehsil to Rs. 367/9/- in Mandla tehsil. The average income per family is the highest in Mandla tehsil, where Baigas have greater opportunities for earning due to extensive exploitation of forests on commercial lines, both by the forest contractors and the Forest Department. Development of means of communication and transport and nearness of market encourage Baigas to grow commercial crops like Rai and pulses. In certain villages wheat cultivation has also become common. But the forest work and road labour are largely responsibe for raising Baiga's income in this region as 68.8 per cent of their income is derived from this source. The mixed character of Baiga villages and the nearness of Gond and Caste Hindu villages also permit them to sell forest produce at remunerative rates. The average income per family was found to be the lowest among the Baiga families of the Dindori tehsil. The social position of Baigas of this region hangs between the two extremes. They are neither completely cut off from the currents of 'civilisation' like the villages of the Baiga Chak or the Kawardha tehsil nor are they reaping the benefits of acculturisation and modern progress as in the Baihar and Mandla tehsils. Baigas in Dindori tehsil feel themselves uprooted from their aboriginal economy. Nor do they find themselves in a position to reap the advantages of general social progress. Theirs is a typical case of disintegration of Baiga economy under the impact of modern economic forces. They earn 45.4 per cent of their total income from cultivation, 27.8 per cent from the sale of forest produce, 20.4 per cent from forest labour and road work and the remainder from other subsidiary sources. Economic conditions are the worst, it appears, in the villages which are in a state of transition from primitive to rural economy. This inference is further confirmed by the cases of Baiga Chak and Kawardha tehsil where the average income per family is Rs. 273/5/- and Rs. 283/3/- respectively. In Baiga Chak the Government have been making concerted efforts to wean Baigas from the axe and train them in plough-cultivation. But the geographical conditions and the stage of general economic development do not permit the tribesmen to reorganise their economy on modern lines. Thus an external agency has been helping them to pass through the transition since 1890. Its effects are reflected in the average income per family of this region which is Rs. 273/5/- being Rs. 94/4/- less than the highest income in the Mandla tehsil namely Rs. 367/9/-. The condition of villages of Kawardha tehsil bordering on the Mandla—Bicchia—Mawai—Chara road, bears similarity with Dindori villages and the Baiga Chak—the latter an example of ill-managed transition and the former of rapid and uncontrolled change. In Kawardha tehsil the average income per family does not exceed Rs. 283/3/-. The villages of Mungeli tehsil present a solitary example where the average income per family is as high as Rs. 323/3/- inspite of the backwardness of the area. Two factors seem to have raised income in this tract. Firstly the villages are substantially cut off from the developed area and thus the Baiga have not entered the stage of transition to any great extent. They are able to live their traditional life. The forces of exploitation like the money lender and forest contractors have not penetrated the area for till recently quite a good number of Baiga villages was in the Padaria Zamindari. Secondly, a road is under construction to open up the area which offers enough work to aboriginals; but being still incomplete it has not brought the forces of transition into operation. The Baiga villages of Baihar tehsil bear considerable similarity to the Mandla region, for both the areas have been opened up and developed. There are enough opportunities of forest and road work which contribute nearly 63.4 per cent of the total income of the family. However, a fact worthy of note may be mentioned about these regions. In Mandla region agriculture contributes only 6.8 per cent of the total income and the Baiga here earn nearly 18 per cent of their income from forest produce; while in Baihar region the percentage of income from agriculture is about 29.2 and only 0.8 for sale of forest produce. It appears the Baihar region has passed that stage of progress in which aboriginals depend upon uncertain means of livelihood like the sale of forest produce. They have taken to more dependable and regular source of income like agriculture. The following table shows the average income per family in different regions :—

Table showing Gradation in Baiga Income according to Transformation of Economy

(Average Income per family in different regions)

Region	Number of families surveyed	Total Income			Average Income per family		
		Rs.	As.	P.	Rs.	As.	P.
Mandla	68	24,996	14	0	367	9	0
Baihar	55	19,059	8	0	346	8	0
Mungeli	52	16,806	6	0	323	3	0
Kawardha	27	7,754	15	0	283	3	0
Baiga Chak	91	24,869	9	0	273	5	0
Dindori	57	13,402	13	0	235	0	0
For whole Baiga land	350	106,890	1	0	305	6	0

Per Capita Income in Different Regions

Region	Total number of persons surveyed	Average size of family	Total Income			Average Income per family			Per Capita Income		
			Rs.	As.	Ps.	Rs.	As.	P.	Rs.	As.	P
Kawardha*	114	4.2	7,754	15	0	283	3	0	68	0	0
Baihar	333	6	19,059	8	0	346	8	0	57	4	0
Mungeli	296	5.7	16,806	6	0	323	3	0	56	12	0
Mandla	458	6.7	24,996	14	0	367	9	0	54	9	0
Dindori	333	5.8	13,402	13	0	235	0	0	40	3	0
Baiga Chak	658	7.2	24,869	9	0	273	5	0	37	13	0
For the whole area surveyed.	2192	6.26	106,890	1	0	305	6	0	48	12	0

*The average size per family in this region is as low as 4.2 (for the whole area it is 6.26), hence high per capita income despite low income per family.

Pattern of Income Distribution

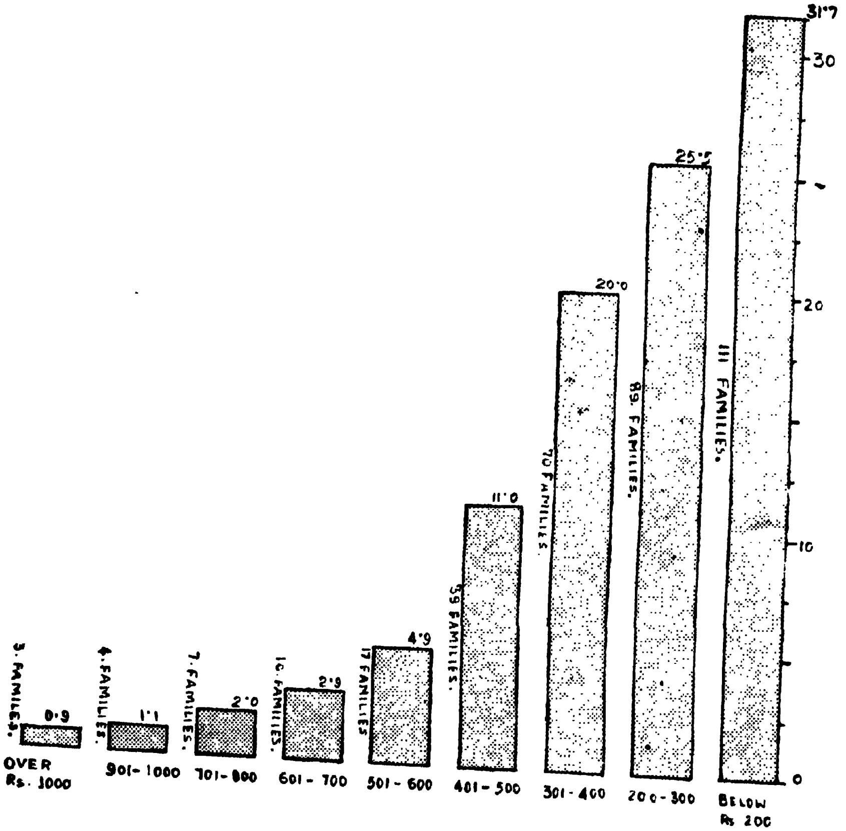
In order to know the pattern of distribution of income among the Baiga, it is essential to classify the families into different income groups. This will also roughly measure the economic equality in the Baiga community. The following table gives an analysis of distribution of income among the Baiga :-

DISTRIBUTION OF BAIGA FAMILIES INTO INCOME GROUPS

Income Group	Number of Families in the Group	Percentage to the total number of families
Below Rs. 200	111	31.7
Between Rs. 200— 300	89	25.5
,, Rs. 301— 400	70	20.0
,, Rs. 401— 500	39	11.0
,, Rs. 501— 600	17	4.9
,, Rs. 601— 700	10	2.9
,, Rs. 701— 800	7	2.0
,, Rs. 801— 900	Nil	Nil
,, Rs. 901—1000	4	1.1
Over Rs. 1000	3	0.9
Total	350	100

According to the above table, out of 350 families 200 earn between Re. 1 and Rs. 301—that is 57.2 per cent families come under this group. If the persons of the next income group Rs. 301—400 are also included (average income per family being Rs. 305), 77.2 per cent families are earning between Rs. 1—400. The analysis shows that 57.2 per cent families are not earning even an average income (Rs. 305) and 20 per cent families are just on the verge of average income. Thus 77.2 per cent

Pattern of Distribution of Income among the Baiga.



families are either below the average income or just touching it. The remainder 22.8 per cent families earn more than the average income. The number of families earning over Rs. 600 is 24 out of 350 or 6.9 per cent. Thus, it will be seen there is considerable equality of income among the Baiga. But in a community of low income, equality in income simply means equal distribution of poverty. The truth in the statement is confirmed by the fact that nearly 57.2 per cent of the families are earning below the average income. The following diagram exhibits the pattern of distribution of income among the Baiga.

Income in Forest and Ryotwari Villages

There is a sharp dissimilarity in the economic environment of the Forest and Ryotwari villages. The land tenure system, opportunities of non-agricultural employment and marketing facilities differ in both the types of villages. The former are managed by the Forest Department while the latter have been depending till very recently upon the malguzars or zamindari management. Consequently variations occur in average family income in Forest villages and Ryotwari villages. The table on the next page exhibits these variations.

As the statistical analysis shows the average income per family in the Forest Village is Rs. 339/3, whle in the Ryotwari villages it is Rs. 167/14. The difference of about Rs. 171/- in family incomes of the two kinds of villages is explained by the differing economic conditions prevailing in these villages. The Forest Villages are established, managed and controlled by the Forest Department which provides forest and road work to the aboriginal and contributes nearly 44.8 per cent to the total income of the Baiga. Moreover, an agreement between the Government and the forest contractor usually provides that the latter will employ (by arrangement with Forest Officer) the inhabitants of forest villages in preference to any other workman. and will pay them at the usual local rates. Since forest villages are directly managed by the Forest Department, moneylenders and pedlars are not allowed to visit these areas so frequently. Moreover, forest villages enjoy certain privileges of nistar,* etc., which are not available to a resident of the Ryotwari village. But the most significant factor responsible for the difference in family income in Forest and Ryotwari villages, is the availability of more forest and road work in the former.† The advantageous position of the forest villages and the consequent higher income in them emphasise the necessity of special measures to

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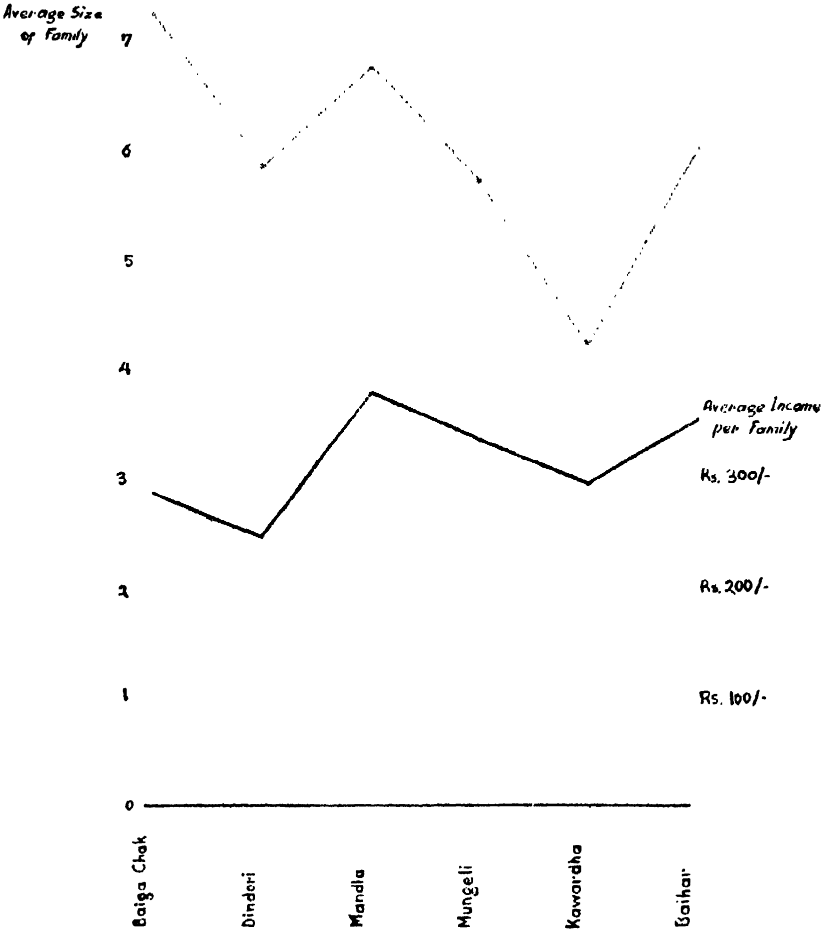
* Right for collecting fuel, bamboo and grass from forests for bonafide domestic use.

† The C.P. & Berar Forest Manual Vol. I, para 68.

AVERAGE INCOME PER FAMILY IN FOREST AND RYOTWARI VILLAGES

Region	Total Number of families	Forest Villages			Ryotwari Villages		
		Number of families surveyed in Forest Villages	Total Income of Forest Villages	Average Income per family in Forest Villages	Number of families surveyed in Ryotwari Villages	Total Income in Ryotwari Villages	Average Income per family in Ryotwari Villages
			Rs. As.	Rs. As.		Rs. As.	Rs. As.
Baiga Chak ...	91	91	24,869 9	273 5	...	...	...
Dindori ...	57	23	8,045 3	249 13	34	5,357 10	157 9
Mandla ...	68	53	22,671 15	427 12	15	2,324 15	155 0
Mungeli ...	52	Due to merger of Indian States and Zamindaries Baiga Villages in these tehsils were not still demarcated as F.V. or R.V.					
Kawardha ...	27						
Baihar ...	55	48	17,339 2	361 3	7	1,720 6	245 12
Total ...	350	215	72,925 13	339 3	56	9,402 15	167 14

RELATION OF SIZE OF FAMILY WITH ITS AVERAGE INCOME



protect the economic interest of aboriginals and to bring about a regulated and planned development of aboriginal economy. Higher income in the forest villages simply confirm Mr. Symington's observation that 'we must regard the aboriginal as being in the nursery. Like a child he must be protected from outside interference and victimization, and like a child he must be taught how to hold his own.'*

Size of Family and its Income

There is an inter-relation between the size of a family and its income. In given economic conditions there is usually an optimum size of the family which earns maximum income in a definite period. Any increase or decrease in this size of the family causes reduction in the income of the family provided the economic conditions are stationery. However, when economic resources fall short of the man-power of the family, the income falls inspite of the optimum or near-optimum size of the family. This tendency is perceptible in the following table, of course in an approximate manner :-

RELATION OF SIZE OF FAMILY TO AVERAGE INCOME.

Region	Average Size of family.	Average Income per family.	
		Rs.	As.
Baiga Chak	7.2	273	5
Dindori Tehsil	5.8	235	0
Mandla Tehsil	6.7	367	9
Mungeli Tehsil	5.7	323	3
Kawardha Tehsil	4.2	283	3
Baihar Tehsil	6.0	346	8
For the Whole Baiga land.	6.26	305	6

A family of 6.7 persons appears to be the optimum size of family which earns the highest income namely Rs. 367/9. A reduction in the size of family causes fall in its income as in the case of Kawardha, where the size of the family being 4.2, the average income per family declines to Rs. 283/3/-. Any increase in the optimum size of the family without corresponding improvement in the economic resources to be operated upon also results in a decline in the income as the case of the Baiga Chak shows where the average size of the family being 7.2 (above the optimum), income is only Rs. 273/5/-. The case of Dindori tehsil villages seems to be an exception to this inference where the average family size is near-optimum (5.8), but the gap between the actual income and the income of the optimum size family is wide i.e. Rs. 132/9/0. It appears the economic resources available for exploitation are not adequate and there is under-employment among the aboriginals of this area. A similar tendency, it seems, is operating in the Baiga Chak where a slight increase in the size of the family (from 6.7 to 7.2) causes reduction of Rs. 114/4 in the average income of the family. That people in these regions remain under-employed was confirmed by our personal observation. Baigas complained that when a family expanded its new members did not get land plots. They had neither sufficient *barra* lands for plough cultivation. The region being cut off, did not offer enough forest or road work.

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*D Symington : 'Report on the Aboriginal and Hill Tribes of the Partially Excluded Areas in the Bombay Presidency' p. 2.

Comparison with per capita income in the State and National Income

After analysing the various aspects of Baiga's income an attempt is made to compare it with per capita income of Madhya Pradesh and the country as a whole. The per capita income of Madhya Pradesh has not been estimated scientifically so far. However, in 1939 the C.P. & Berar Industrial Survey Committee gave a rough estimate of per capita income in the Central Provinces. 'We may safely say that the per capita income per annum in the Province would be in the neighbourhood of Rs. 12/-'*. Our investigations confirm the findings of the Industrial Survey Committee as the per capita income of the Baiga population works out at Rs. 48/12/- in 1951-52. Agricultural prices have risen four-fold after the publication of the Report of the Industrial Survey Committee (1939). Our investigations do not indicate any appreciable change in the relative per capita income of the rural population.

A comparison of per capita income of the Baiga tribe with the national per capita income reveals that the Baiga population is practically at the lowest rung of the national income. According to the National Income Committee (1951) the per capita national income of India in 1948-49, was Rs. 255/-.† While according to our survey the per capita income among the Baiga comes to Rs. 48/12/-. The vast difference of nearly Rs. 207/- in per capita income indicates the economic inequality between the general population and the Baiga and calls for immediate measures of raising the income.

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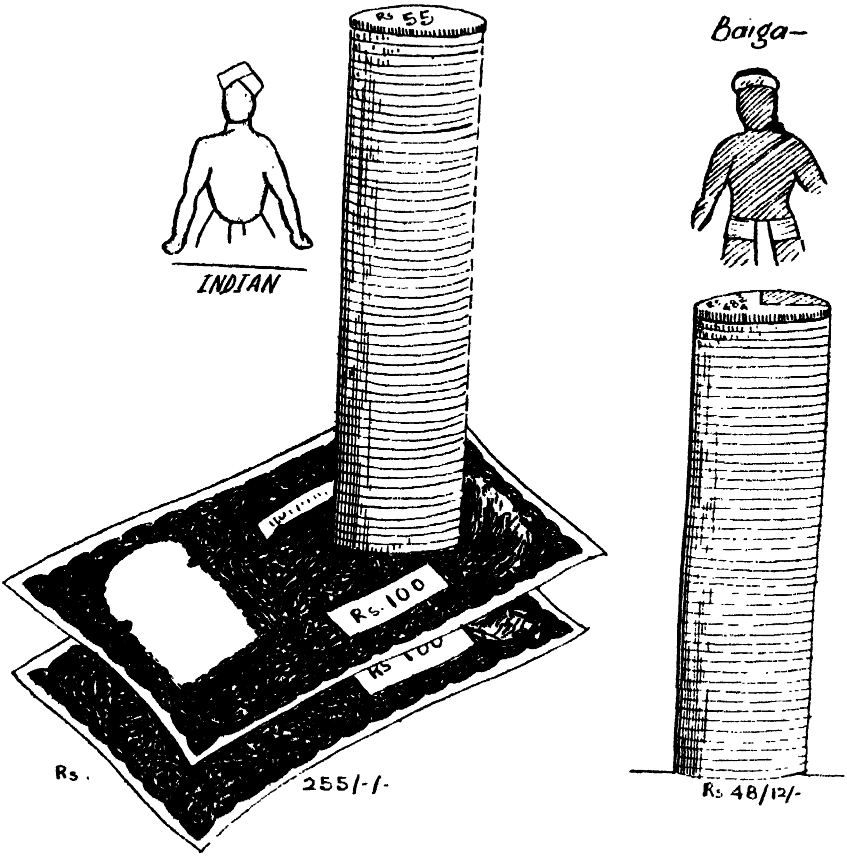
* 'Report of C.P. & Berar Industrial Survey Committee', 1939.

† See First Report of the National Income Committee, 1951, page 33.

PER CAPITA INCOME OF BAIGA COMPARED WITH NATIONAL PER CAPITA INCOME.



CHAPTER IX (B)

EXPENDITURE AND STANDARD OF LIVING

Baiga's life is literally simple. Although like an ordinary human being he needs food and shelter but his other wants are few and limited in variety. The simplicity has certainly no philosophic foundation, yet he lives a life of austerity of which he is conscious. The low standard of consumption pinches him only when his biological requirements remain unfulfilled or when he comes into contact with the 'civilised' and looks at the world from a comparative angle. Otherwise confined to themselves, the Baiga believe in simple life. The belief has found expression in their myths and legends, too. They live from hand to mouth on roots and produce of the wild. But this is no problem to a Baiga. He finds the answer in the myth. He was constituted in poverty by divine permission; it is his privilege, not his shame. He is the child of earth, and must live close to the earth, his mother. What was good enough for our great ancestor Nanga Baiga, he seems to say, is good enough for us.* Baiga's traditional diet is extremely simple and natural. Given proper opportunity he will not keep his diet predominantly of cereals. Pej, a sort of gruel made out of Kutki, is the foundation of his diet; but he supplements it abundantly with leafy vegetables, fruits, roots and tubers—a variety of hundreds, all called as Bhaji and Kanda Koosa. These roots are very nutritious and the Baiga are reputed for their selection and collection. Practically the whole range of flesh food from the tiger to the mouse is acceptable to the aboriginal palate. Fish is eaten at the evening meal and is a very popular dish among them. Milk or ghee does not find any place in a Baiga's diet. But the children do get their share often. Ordinarily a Baiga does not make spicy preparations. Salt is his main condiment and a little of red chillies from his own 'bari' render his leafy vegetable delicious. Roasted or fried articles are a rarity in the Baiga land. But meat is sometimes prepared with a little of oil, salt, chillies and turmeric. Baigas prepare their own spices from wild roots and seeds and leaves known as Baigani masala. At feasts and ceremonies, rice, *dal*, *gur* and well prepared meat please Baiga's palate.

As regards cloth, the very word Baiga in the rural areas denotes a half nude. A Baiga untouched by civilisation will hang only a strip of cloth just to cover his private parts. And he is not ashamed of it.

***Elwin : Ibid, p. 307.**

For his ancestor was Nanga Baiga who had only a two hand long strip of cloth for *langoti*. The women also do not require much cloth except a Sari of eight yards which just covers their breasts and thighs. In olden days it used to be white in colour and was specially prepared by the Panka, an aboriginal tribe. The Baiga do not consider it necessary to live in an elaborate house. In fact, a typical Baiga house is more of a store house and a resting place for night. For most of the time during the day male members are either in the forest or on the *bewar*. Baigin also spends from four to five hours in collecting forest produce. It is then natural that Baiga requires a place for the cooking hearth, space for sleeping and a small verandah on which to squat himself or to entertain guests. Traditionally Baiga had been living in shifting villages or he was a dweller of shifting homes. Therefore he is seldom serious about his house for he is of nomad blood. The Baiga home is not a permanent abode, but a good tent for a couple of years.

Baiga is a medicine-man too. His system of curing disease is partly based on magic and partly on herbs and roots. Baiga's social traditions are not in harmony with the modern system of medicine. It is only when his own magic or prescription fails that he surrenders himself to the doctor or *vaidya*—a step considered desparate by the tribesman. Ordinarily Baiga does not, therefore, include medicine in his normal expenditure. Similarly, cost of education does not find any place in a Baiga's budget. The standard of living will not fall, in Baiga's opinion, below the ideal point if it does not provide for formal education. However, recreation and drink are essential items in his budget. Many factors prompt him to drink namely fun, feast, faith, fear, frustration and functional disorders. His belief is that life will not be worth living if liquor is taken out of it. Life will equally be without its juice if dance and recreation do not break the monotony of daily routine. Drink and dance—the twin tonic he must have, for without them he cannot enjoy the rythm of life. An ideal family budget must not deprive him of these two essential items.

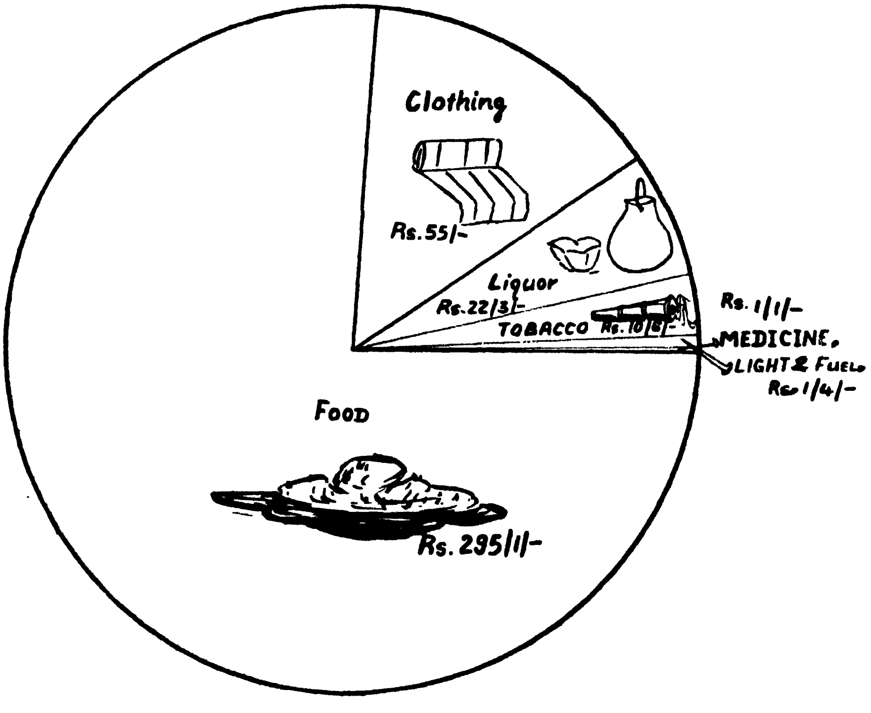
BAIGA'S COST OF LIVING

Food

Food is the hub of primitive life. Like primitive forest tribesmen Baigas are traditional foodgatherers and hunters. Food quest is the propelling force behind cultivation, collection of forest produce, hunting and fishing. Baiga has to arrange tribal feast for atoning a breach of tribal law. Food offerings are made to gods to seek their blessings. The Gunia is given food gifts for curing disease. Dancing is followed by feasting. The yearly time table and daily routine revolve around

Average Annual Expenditure in a Baiga Family

Average cost of living Rs. 387/5/-



the axis of food. Many of his rituals and ceremonies have food and harvest as their basis—Bidri, Hareli, Nava, etc. The songs testify to the importance of food. It provides him many Karma and Dadaria songs.

Yet the staple food of the Baiga is the simplest and coarsest possible. Pej—gruel of Kutki or Kodon—is the main article of his diet. It is taken twice a day—at the time of morning meal called *juara*, and at the time of *marraiya* in the afternoon. In the evening (Biyari) Baiga usually takes Kodai and *dal* and some vegetables. He supplements his diet with a variety of leafy vegetables, roots, fruits, tubers and herbs.* Fish is not considered to be a heavy food, for the Baiga believe it can be digested in half the time of usual diet. It is prepared in oil and buttermilk, spiced with turmeric, chillies and salt. Baiga relishes meat diet. Meat is first boiled in water and then fried in oil or cut into curry. They specially delight in a roast goat which is prepared for special occasions. A goat is suspended above fire, the party pull bits of the flesh out of the flames and eat them while drinking. Most of the Baiga keep poultry and thus eggs enter their diet frequently. But fowls and chickens are usually reserved for sacrificial food.

Ghee or oil is not consumed daily in a Baiga home. Baigas generally do not prepare ghee as the milk yield is very low in hilly regions. Similarly oil is a luxury enjoyed on rare occasions. Ramtilla oil is extracted at home with the help of an indigenous oil—extracting apparatus known as *petla*. But in the more opened up areas where Baigas have easy and regular access to weekly markets *til* or mustard oil has come into vogue. Where *mahua* seeds known as *gulli* are available in plenty, *gulli* oil is extracted with *petla* and receives Baiga's first preference. Thus the per capita consumption of edible oil varies according to the availability of *gulli*, cultivation of *ramtilla* or nearness of the weekly markets.

Like the caste cultivators of Mahakoshal Baiga is not a heavy consumer of spices. He takes chillies in light quantity and goes without it when subsisting on pej and Kodai only. Not unoften his leafy vegetables and roots and tubers are boiled only with salt. But salt he must have. In fact, it is through the medium of salt that Baiga comes into contact with the civilised world as it takes him to the weekly markets at least once a month. Among other spices mention may be made of turmeric and garlic which are used in preparing meat or fish diet. Baigas are partially self-sufficient in some of the spices. They grow chillies, garlic and *rai* raised on their *bari*. Wild turmeric and Baigani *masala* are collected from forests. Sugar or *gur* is consumed rarely,

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***A list of roots and fruits eaten by the Baiga is given in the Appendix.**

only on ceremonial occasions. In most of the isolated villages sugar is still unknown and *gur* is considered a first class sweet both by the children as well as the old. Honey is easily available in the forests and, therefore, it serves the purpose of *gur* or sugar. A Baiga relishes honey very much and, therefore, calls it *rasa.*

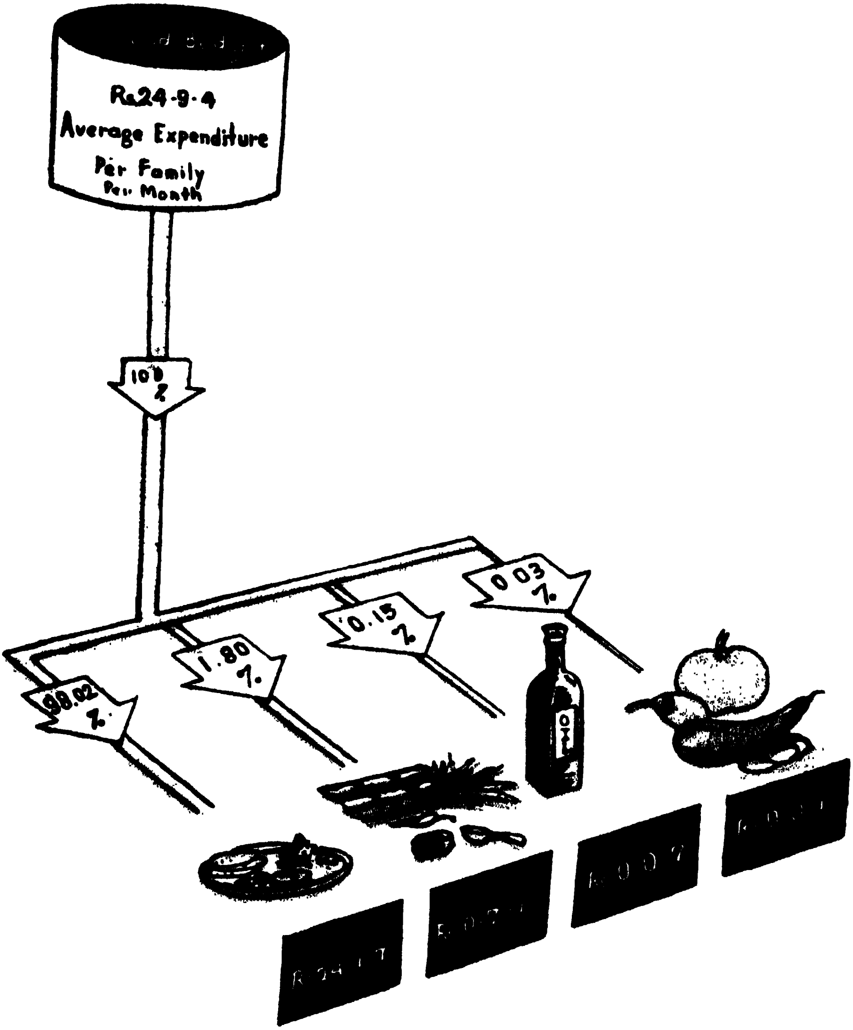
A Baiga spends nearly 76 per cent of his total cost of living on food — namely foodgrains, spices, oil, vegetables and *gur* etc. The following table shows the relative importance of different items in a Baiga's food budget :—

BAIGA'S FOOD BUDGET (1951-52.)

Articles		Total expenditure of 350 families		Average expenditure per family per month			Percentage to total cost on food
		Rs.	As.	Rs.	As.	Ps.	
Foodgrains and Pulses	...	1,01,226	8	24	1	7	98.02
Salt, Spices, Sugar etc.	...	1,861	10	0	7	1	1.80
Oils and Fats	...	157	0	0	0	7	0.15
Vegetables	...	29	14	0	0	1	0.03
Total	...	1,03,275	0	24	9	4	

An analysis of the food budget shows that 98.02 per cent of the total food expenditure is spent on foodgrains alone. The high percentage spent on foodgrains proves that settled life has converted Baiga's diet into a predominantly cereal diet. With the progress of plough cultivation the Baiga, it appears, are devoting less time to the collection of roots and fruits. As stated earlier they do not spend much on spices and salt. About 1.80 per cent of the total food expenses is spent on this item. Thus Baiga's food is not heavily spiced as in the case of ordinary cultivators of Marathi speaking population of the Berar region. Oil, fat and sugar are also of little significance as only 0.15 per cent of the total food expenditure is devoted to this item. It has not been possible to estimate the quantity of oil extracted at a Baiga's home as it is done irregularly and according to necessity. However, many Baigas said that they use

BAIGA'S FOOD BUDGET.



oil in cooking very sparingly. Most of their vegetables are boiled in water, and oil is used only when fish or meat is prepared. Thus, it will not be far from reality to say that on the whole Baiga diet is primarily a boiled and not a fried one. Baiga rarely purchases vegetables from the market. He does not know the method of cooking vegetables like people of the plains nor does he relish them. Therefore his expenditure on vegetables is insignificant 0.03 per cent of the total expenditure on food.

A region-wise analysis of the relative importance of different items of food, discloses that the percentage expenditure on foodgrains to total cost of living varies from 73.2 to 79.2, on salt and spices from 1.9 to 1.0, on oil from 0.15 to 0.3. It may, however, be pointed out that there are differences in the kind of foodgrains consumed in different regions. For example, where rice is cultivated, it takes the place of Kodon Kutki to some extent. Gram may be consumed in gram producing areas or where the proportion of *urd* and *masur* is high they may displace *arhar* pulse. The effect of culture cantact on dietary habits was visible among the Baiga of Baihar and Mandla. Here they have started eating wheat. Dal is now taken almost regularly. They also consume certain spices commonly used in the villages of the plains. Consumption of *gur* and sugar is on the increase in these areas. They are now familiar with the food of the rural population of the plains. Their food at the time of marriage or tribal feast is more elaborately prepared. It is surprising that Baigas of Baihar have now come to know of tea; probably due to the presence of larger numbers of forest officials and forest contractors. So also Baigas of Mandla forest villages are acquainted with tea and sugar. However, where undeveloped means of transport have kept some group of villages in isolation, new food habits have not affected them. In such places their traditional diet consisting of coarse grains—Kodon Kutki—supplemented with Kanda and some meat, still holds its own. On the whole, it may be stated, the standard of food consumption does not vary to any great extent among Baigas of different regions. Despite topographical factors, working of the forces of civilisation, variations in family income and differences in the kind of agricultural production, there appears to be a sort of general uniformity in the standard of tribal diet from which the regional standards do not deviate too far. Traditional uniformity in the standard of food is exhibited by the table on next page.

There are certain reasons for this approximate uniformity in the standard of consumption of the Baiga. Dietary traditions shaped by the conditions of forest life, agricultural production and seasonal cycles in the supply of food articles appear to be the main cause of this uniformity. Besides, absence of glaring economic disparities in terms of family income

REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN THE PERCENTAGE—EXPENDITURE ON DIFFERENT FOOD ARTICLES TO TOTAL COST OF LIVING

Region	Percentage to total cost of living.			
	Foodgrain	Salt and Spices	Oils and Fats	Vegetables
Baihar	73.2	1.9	0.12	...
Baiga Chak	75.1	1.0	...	...
Dindori	73.9	1.4	0.3	0.12
Mandla	73.4	1.4	0.15	0.01
Mungeli	79.2	1.3	0.03	...
Kawardha	75.4	1.6	...	...

also explain the situation. The Baiga do not believe, it must be remembered, in multiplying their wants. One can hardly find any material difference in the standard of living of a Baiga with a surplus budget and another in deficit. The only difference is in the quantity of grain consumed and not in its quality. The general pattern of diet practically remains the same. Whatever little surplus one has rather finds outlet in drink. As will be seen later there are variations in the percentage expenditure on drink in different regions.

Food is a means to satisfy not only hunger. It has a social significance too in Baigas' family and tribal life. 'Traditional, tribal or cultural attitudes towards food are among the most important cohesive forces in the community, which unite its members to each other and differentiate them from the surrounding tribes.'* Baigas attach great importance to the production and the gathering of food as one of the main links of social cohesion within the family, and to a lesser degree within the village community; they assist one another in the production or acquisition of food. Ritual hunt is a co-operative activity. In chasing animals they act collectively and share the kill on a co-operative basis. Sometimes the animal is eaten communally. In everyday life, it is true, there are no social groupings. Food is consumed by the family. At feasts and ceremonies, however, all households of a village join in a common meal. At marriage, funeral or penalty feasts, food is shared by the whole tribal community of the village or group of villages, though food is offered by the individual family. On Dusserah festival the whole village contributes to the village food fund and the neighbouring villagers are the guests of the inviting villagers. A man or woman guilty of the violation of a tribal law can get his or her offence condoned by giving a communal feast. Thus, the communal feast is the symbol of group solidarity. Like the Reddis food among the Baiga is the main medium whereby defilament or impurity is transmitted, and this sentiment is reflected in the taboo that forbids women to cook during menstruation and after child birth. and prevents ex-communicated members of the tribe as well as people of other castes from touching his food.* Baigas attach extraordinary sanctity to sacrificial food. Rituals and customs prescribe the quantity and kind of such food. The priest *gunia* cooks it or at least men. The time and the manner in which it should be offered to the god and later on shared by the family or village community are laid down by customary laws. Not only the sacrificial food but the Baiga's daily diet too has its mythical foundation. Long ago, they say, Bhagvan called all the tribes of mankind to a feast. On one side he put rice and *dal*, vegetable and meat curry for Hindus, on the other side he put chapati, ghi, and sugar for the Baiga and Gond. When everyone had come, Bhagvan asked them to sit down and eat. But at that moment, a rat came out of its hole, and ran across the floor. As Bhagvan had provided no meat for the Gond and Baiga, they all jumped up, and chased the rat so that they could add it to the feast. But they could not catch it, and when they came back they found that the Hindus had come and taken all their chapaties, ghi and sugar, and there was nothing left for them at all. Then Bhagvan brought the water in which the rice had been boiled and gave it to them. "This is pej", he said, "and you will eat it for ever."†

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*B. Malinowski's Preface to 'Hunger and Work in a Savage Society, by A.I. Richard.

Baiga's food is simple, coarse, and also monotonous. Refinement and delicacy in preparation or eating are practically nil. However, some roots, leaves and fruits introduce some variety or a good catch of fish or a kill in the hunt bring some tasty change. But the question remains to be answered : Is Baiga's food ill balanced and lacking nutrition ? It is difficult to make any definite statement as the caloric value of Baiga's staple foodgrains—Kodon and Kutki—has not been analysed by the

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***See Christoph Von Furer Haimendorf: *The Reddis of the Bison Hills', p. 101.**
†Elwin : Ibid. p. 49.

experts of nutrition. Nor has nutritional survey so far been undertaken of his diet or of tribal diet in this area. The innumerable roots. tubers, leaves and fruits which enter into Baiga's diet are probably still not known to the dietetic experts. They have come only on the list of a botanist or Forest Department. How these forest products pass through various processes at the hands of a Baiga housewife and ultimately reach the Baiga's dish is still a mystery not only to the urban population, but also to the villagers of the plains. In the absence of definite scientific calculation of the caloric value of Kodon and Kutki it is difficult to give a nutritional appraisal of the Baiga diet. However, general opinion of some experts gives a rough idea about the nutritional value of tribal food. In the opinion of W.V. Grigson, who spent over twenty years among the hill tribes of Bastar State, the small millets, Kodon, Kutki, Kangri and Mandia are highly nutritive, and even the hand milled rice is less nutritive. Then again the basis of aboriginal's diet has not been affected by contact with the men of the plains; it is extremely varied, with the flesh of animals from the rat to the tiger, and with great numbers of forest fruits, roots and tubers. Grigson is not in favour of introducing new vegetables and fruits for we are not sure that what we are advising is better than what the Baiga is already using, and it might be sounder to try improving the forest fruits and roots to which he is accustomed and which are accustomed to his climate and soil. In the variety of his food may lie some nutritive salvation for the sophisticated villages of the plain.* In his tour of the tribal areas of the Balaghat district Dr. Aykroyd of the Nutritional Institute at Coonoor saw surprisingly few signs of under-nourishment among the aboriginals.† However, there is evidence on the other side, too. N.V. Bapat, Secretary, Banvasi Seva Mandal, who tours the area in a Medical Van, gives a different picture. According to him the hard working Gond or Baiga does not get proper nourishment for the strenuous work he does. His poor stamina makes him subject to frequent attacks of malaria. The epidemics that rule supreme in changes of seasons, like small-pox, cholera and plague make him an easy prey. All types of diseases rule supreme in the tribal land. Skin, respiratory and stomach disease and malaria are most common. A few diseases take a large toll of tribal life due to under-nourishment. The ordinary daily food of the tribal should be carefully evaluated and additions of foodstuff easily available in the locality, to balance their diet may be suggested.‡

***Grigson : 'The Aboriginal Problem in C.P. and Berar', p. 301.**

†Quoted by Grigson: Ibid. p. 301.

‡N.V. Bapat : 'The Problem of Health and Hygiene in Tribal Areas', a paper read at the Tribal Welfare Conference held at Delhi in June, 1952.

A recent survey conducted by the Conservator of Forests, Eastern Circle, of the prevalence of yaw in the backward scheduled forest areas of Mandla, Bilaspur and Balaghat divisions revealed certain facts about the undernourishment of the tribal population. Out of 3069 inhabitants of 31 forest villages, 136 are reported to be suffering from yaw, 76 being men, 15 women, 33 boys, and 12 girls. The Conservator of Forests shows some doubt that the shifting cultivation reduces the nutrition value of the food crops grown by the Baiga on the denuded slopes.* However, it is notable that the incidence of yaws is quite low or almost negligible in the predominantly Baiga areas. The details of the survey prove this fact :

INCIDENCE OF YAWS AMONG BAIGAS

Division	Range	Total Population surveyed	Number of Baiga's affected	
Bilaspur	Kota	442	18	Living in villages of mixed population
,,	Lormi	1,072	50	
,,	Lamni	224	20	
,,	Karanjia	220	2	
		1,958	90	
Balaghat	Supkhar	1,438	Nil	Baiga Region
Mandla	Sarastal	73	Nil	
		1.511	Nil	

Dr. Rambo of the Christ Mission Hospital in Mungeli tehsil, found the physical condition of the Baiga pathetic. 'There was much itch and

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***Results of the Survey furnished by the Çonservator of Forests, Eastern Circle, Jabalpur.**

ringworn. We came across some leprosy. We noted a good deal of gonorrhoea and syphilis. Malaria is the greatest scourage.' He ascribes this state of affairs to a meat deficiency arising from the influence of Hinduism. Constantly being shamed by Hindus for keeping and eating pigs and chickens is still further reducing their vitality.* The game laws and the fear of forest officials have also played their part in reducing the proportion of meat in Baiga's diet. A vegetarian diet may well lead to a further degree of physical degradation. Taken as a whole the Baiga's diet appears to be better balanced in the hills than in the large villages of the plains. Similar conditions about diet were observed by Haimendorf among the Reddis—a hill tribe in Hyderabad. For the Highlander supplements his diet with wild fruits and roots of the jungle, and his diet seems to be a fairly satisfactory combination of fresh vegetables, rich in vitamins, and carbohydrates in the form of grain. In the plains, on the other hand, he devotes little time to collecting wild produce, raises fewer garden crops, and lives mainly on the grain grown on level fields; consequently his diet is overloaded with starch. As forest and game laws restrict hunting, and the contact with high caste Hindus leads them to replace the sacrifice of animals by the offering of coconuts, there will be fewer, and fewer occasions for eating meat.†

Clothing

Baiga is proverbially a half-nude aboriginal. He uses very scanty clothes. A small piece of cloth just hangs to veil his private parts. Hardly a *chadar* is used as protection against weather. A bamboo mat or rice stalks and leaves serve for bedding. It is unusual for him to use any headdress. However, on ceremonial occasions his dress is different. Every youth has a separate dress for dance which consists of a bigger *dhoti*, a jacket, a turban, and some ornaments. He would dress himself better in marriage party, too. But normally a *langoti* is the constant companion of the Baiga. Women use a *sari* called Kapra in their dialect. It is long enough to cover the breast and the lower part upto the knees. They do not use blouse or *choli*. For dance every young woman reserves a better *sari*, generally of red colour. They decorate their bodies with *paijan*, bangles, rings and ear rings when joining a dance party. But their normal requirement is nothing more than a *sari*. An average Baiga family consisting of two adult males, two adult females and three children

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***Quoted by Grigson : Ibid. p. 303**

†Christoph Von Haimendorf : 'The Reddis of the Bison Hills', p. 104. (Parallel example of Reddis)

would require the following cloth during a year :

For Males —	2 Langoties (half-dhoti)	... Rs. 10/-
	2 Phatuis	... Rs. 8/-
	2 Small Turbans	... Rs. 10/-
For Females—	2 Saries (Kapra)	... Rs. 25/-
For Children—	2 Small Langotis made of old clothes	Nil
	Total	... Rs 53/-

The effects of culture-contact are most discernible in the Baiga's dress used in different regions. In predominantly Gond villages they have adopted Gond dress partially. For example the Binjhwar Baigas of Baihar and Niwas tehsil use a long *dhoti* upto the knees and a half-sleeves shirt or a jacket, and a long turban. Some Baiga workers of the Manganese Ore mines at Ukwa (Baihar tehsil) could hardly be distinguished from tha caste-Hindus. Hindu influence has introduced radical changes in their dress. In weekly markets Baigas are seen buying ready-made clothes, commonly used by Hindu villagers. The presence of forest officials, visits by forest contractors and moneylenders and other officials have also affected their dress. The village school teacher's insistence that the Baiga boys should come in Hindu dress also creates a desire among the younger Baigas to dress more elaborately. It was noticed at the Forest School of Adwar, where the number of Baiga boys in the School was nearly 15, that the parents as well as the boys now favour Hindu dress. But this has produced unhealthy effects from the point of view of hygiene. Ordinarily a Baiga cannot afford to spend much on clothes. He cannot have more than one set, which does not allow him to wash his clothes as frequently as he should. Consequently he wears uncleaned clothes which cause many skin diseases ; while in traditional dress the body is sufficiently exposed to air and light and there are less chances for skin diseases.

A Baiga family spends 14.3 per cent of its total cost of living on clothing, or an average family consisting of seven members spends nearly Rs. 55/- annually. The per capita expenditure on cloth works out at Rs. 7/13/-. The percentage expenditure on clothing varies between 11 and 16.7. It is highest in the Baihar tehsil, 16.7, where the Gond and Hindu influence is greatest on the Baiga life. In this tract Baigas wear caste cultivator's dress and also use some bedding. The percentage is lowest in the Mungeli tehsil villages—11.8, the four villages surveyed namely Chakmak, Ladra, Mara Dabra and

Tingadda, are quite orthodox and here the Baiga still wear their traditional dress. In the Baiga Chak the percentage is as high as 15.1, just nearing the maximum of 16.7. It appears the settlement of Gonds and other tribes in the Chak, and deliberate propaganda by the Forest Department, have encouraged the Baiga to improve their dress. In 1931 the Census Superintendent 'found them wearing more clothes than he liked. In fact they are getting civilised.'* But on the whole there is a level of expenditure on cloth from which regional averages do not deviate far. As in food, so in dress there appears to be a uniform standard of consumption of cloth which is true in all the regions, with slight variations. The following table shows the regional percentage expenditure on cloth to total.

EXPENDITURE ON CLOTH

Region	Number of Families surveyed	Total cost of living	Expenditure on clothing	Percentage of the total cost of living
		Rs.	Rs.	
Baiga Chak	91	34.661	5,235	15.1
Dindori Tehsil	57	21,804	3,082	14.1
Mandla Tehsil	68	34,730	4,550	13.1
Mungeli Tehsil	52	14,909	1,769	11.8
Kawardha Tehsil	27	9,985	1,490	14.9
Baihar Tehsil	55	19,484	3.264	16.7
For whole Baiga land	350	1,35,576	19,390	14.3

The Baiga, as stated earlier, dress scantily, yet the percentage of expenditure on cloth is as high as 14.3, while a survey of landless workers in village Khapri disclosed that this class spent 10.3 per cent of its total income on clothing and footwear.* The high expenditure on cloth in case of the half-nude Baiga needs some explanation. It is well known that prices of cloth were quite high during 1951-52 and the Baiga who invariably purchase cloth from weekly markets had to pay still higher prices; while the agricultural worker's of village Khapri residing only about 8 miles from Nagpur, could get cloth at lower rates. The availability of foodgrains locally also affects the percentage expenditure on cloth. The Baiga do not purchase their food-grains from the market. The cost of their food budget has been calculated at the prices ruling in the markets of tribal areas. Consequently their percentage expenditure on food (74.6) is less than that of agricultural workers (80.4). As a result, the percentage expenditure on cloth is higher as compared with that of the agricultural workers, though actually Baigas consume less cloth. The main reason for high expenditure on cloth appears to be the high price of cloth which the Baiga have to pay for their cloth purchases in the weekly markets of tribal areas.

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*See Note on Baigas by Shoobert, in 1931 Census Report, C.P. and Berar, Vol. I.

Liquor and Tobacco

Among drinks and stimulants, the *mahua* liquor and tobacco are Baiga's only favourites. As mentioned earlier, he is notoriously famous for relishing *mahua* liquor. A visit to the market, ceremonial occasions, dancing and observance of rituals, death, marriage, or sickness, harvesting, tribal offence—all begin or end with a leaf-cup of *mahua* liquor. His purse and grain stock permitting, Baiga's first preference is for liquor. The subject is discussed in fuller details in an independent chapter. It must, however, be noted here that *mahua* liquor means more than an intoxicant or offering to gods; it is a dire necessity in sickness, a comfort in distress and a luxury in dance and marriage. But tobacco plays a different role. A Baiga smokes as he breathes—thus goes the saying. Smoking helps him in regaining his lost activity, fills up time gaps when he is idle. and acts as a medium of friendship among the tribesmen. Though manners of smoking are circumscribed by defined etiquette, its frequency is limitless. On being enquired about the quantity consumed, every Baiga doubted whether it could be calculated how many times and how much tobacco he smokes. It is a common sight to find two or three Chungis (leaf pipes) tucked in the loincloth or on ear of the Baiga. But all tobacco is not purchased from the market. The Baiga grow tobacco plants in their *bari* and take the

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***Report on An Enquiry into the Conditions of Agricultural workers in Village Khapri in Madhya Pradesh. (Govt. of India Publication, 1951.)**

utmost care in rearing them. Home-grown tobacco is stronger, but it does not last for more than six to seven months in a year. Ultimately the Baiga purchase tobacco from the weekly market or from some Gond cultivator. Since Baiga has a short memory and he does not include tobacco plants among his crops, it was found difficult to determine the proportion of tobacco purchased from the market and that produced in the *bari*. It was, therefore, not possible to calculate the exact amount of money spent on tobacco. However, a rough idea could be made from the querries answered by the Baiga.

Roughly speaking a Baiga family spends 2.7 per cent of its total expenses of living on tobacco. The chewing habit is not so common as smoking. On an average a family spends nearly Rs. 10,6/- on tobacco in a year. Children and women generally do not smoke. There are regional variations in the percentage of expenditure spent on this item. The regional variations do not indicate any difference in the habit of smoking for almost everywhere Baigas are chain smokers. There are, however, other factors which explain this difference. Where the soil suits and the general practice favours, the larger quantity of tobacco will be produced in the *bari* itself, the less will be purchased from the market —the percentage of expenditure on tobacco to the total cost of living will be lower. Conversely the lower the proportion of home-produced tobacco in total consumption, the higher the percentage of expenditure on tobacco to the total cost of living. Certain social factors also influence smoking habit. The larger the size of the village or the more compact the hamlet, the greater the opportunities for social intercourse and the consequent increase in the consumption of tobacco. A gunia smokes heavily and since he is visited by many persons consumption of tobacco is higher in his case. Similarly where the number of elders in the family is large, not only is their individual consumption higher, but smoking is the medium of social friendship among the old. In a village, where the leader of the tribe resides or some influential families reside, the average expenditure on tobacco will definitely be higher. The nature of work and the size of the congregation of persons required to do it also affect the frequency of smoking. The greater the continuity in work and the larger the number of persons collected at one place, the greater the chance of indulgence in smoking. For example, the expenditure on smoking is highest in the Mandla tehsil where the main occupation of the Baiga is forest work, requiring continuous operation and collection of large number of persons. The work being of seasonal nature leaves long periods of idleness, which again encourage heavy smoking. Due to the reasons stated above there are sharp regional variations in the expenditure incurred on tobacco. The following table exhibits the regional variations in expenditure on tobacco :—

EXPENDITURE ON TOBACCO

Region		Percentage expenditure on tobacco to total cost of living
Baiga Chak	...	0.8
Dindori Tehsil	...	3.6
Mandla Tehsil	...	4.8
Mungeli Tehsil	...	1.6
Kawardha Tehsil	...	3.2
Baihar Tehsil	...	2.12
For whole Baiga land	...	2.7

5.8 per cent of the total cost of living is spent by a Baiga family on drink. Roughly the average annual expenditure per family on drink comes to Rs. 22/3/-. After excluding children and women who generally do not drink, the per capita expenditure among the male adult population works out at Rs. 11/14/- (Total Expenditure on liquor Rs. 7,774/- divided by total adult male population—654). There are regional variations in the percentage of expenditure on drink ranging between 3.6 (in Kawardha tehsil and 7.4 in the Baiga Chak. Drinking being an important aspect of Baiga life, a fuller analysis of the subject is made in a subsequent chapter.

Light and fuel

The Baiga including their women are not habituated to working in the night. With sun-set everyone returns to his home. By 7.30 or 8 P.M. the whole family has finished its meals. The cattle are in before the dusk. The housewife does not work in the night. Thus a Baiga's day begins with sun-rise and ends with sun-set. The Baiga house does not require any elaborate lighting arrangement. Besides, the Baiga house, as stated earlier, is a long room divided into two apartments by grainbins. The cooking side is lighted with the hearth fire, while fire is also kept burning for warmth on the other side. Normally irregular and smoky light caused by the hearth fire is considered sufficient by the Baiga. Yet, it is not uncommon to find a small kerosene or castor oil lamp in the corner of his house. The use of a kerosene oil lamp is on the increase in recent years. If their budget permits, on an average a Baiga family consumes about 6 to 8 bottles of kerosene oil during a year. They buy kerosene oil from the weekly markets once a month or once in two months. It is often purchased with cash as the shopkeeper does not accept any commodity in return. But if a Baiga is short of money, he will readily dispense with kerosene oil. Practically in every village there are some families which do not use kerosene oil throughout the year. However, richer families will have even an hurricane lantern and a lamp, too. Those who keep a large number of cattle, use a lantern particularly in the rainy season. It is notable that a lamp in the forest is a means of not only light but also an effective method of warding off wild animals. The old practice was to burn *mashals* or grass while passing through jungles in the night. Even now a big fire is lit up in the centre of the village till midnight so that wild animals may not come near the village. At a dance performance or marriage celebration not a kerosene lamp but large fire lights up the spot. In villages where castor seeds are available in plenty, or the crop of mustard seed is good, Baigas extract oil with *petla* and use an ordinary oil lamp. It may be noted that if a Baiga at all burns an ordinary oil lamp, the oil is extracted at home, very seldom purchased from the market. But the use of kerosene oil lamps is spreading fast due to the development of roads, to the opening up of markets and extension of forest work under the Forest Department and the forest contractors.

Baiga spends practically nothing on fuel. He does not pay anything for bringing fuel from forests in the Forest villages, while in the Ryotwari villages the *nistar* charges are usually four annas per family. Baiga is a traditional woodcutter. Fuel collection is almost a fun for him, although his consumption of fuel is much more than that of an ordinary cultivator. For he burns fuel for cooking, lighting, warming himself and the house, and scaring away the wild animals. One can see heaps of dried up wood collected outside the village. Big logs are lit up and kept burning for days together. Since Baigas do not use any cover during the winter season, the whole family sleeps around the fire that smoulders throughout the night. In cooking too the housewife burns much fuel as the coarse grains like Kutki and Kodon, and roots and tubers take a long time to boil. There is fire in the hearth practically throughout the day. But this heavy consumption of fuel does not entail any extra expenditure except labour, because wood is available almost free of charge in the nearby forest.

In a Baiga family nearly 0.4 per cent of the total cost of living is spent on light and fuel; or the annual expenditure per family comes to about Rs. 1/4/-. There are, however, variations in the percentage expenditure on light and fuel in various regions of the Baiga land. General economic conditions, nature of work carried on in the region, degree of culture-contact and the social set up of villages of the region account for these variations.

Housing

The Baiga do not have to incur monetary expenditure on construction of their houses. A couple of long posts, some bamboos and grass and mud—is all that is required for raising a Baiga hut. Most of this material the Baiga get from the nearby forest. In the forest villages every household is entitled to a free supply of all thorns and wood required for bonafide agricultural purposes, also of such wood and grass for house building and repairs as the forest Officer may deem reasonable, also of dead wood for fuel, bamboos, and of leaves.* In building or repairing a house, therefore, a Baiga has to contribute his personal labour only. Whatever little furniture like a cot, small stool, and mat which he uses, are prepared by himself. He does not use any brass utensils except a water pot (Kaseri) purchased only once in lifetime. His house and household articles are so simple that out of 350 Baiga families surveyed, only one family (and that too had a liquor distillery) had to incur some expenditure on housing. There is nothing like house-rent in the Baiga family budget. If this case is excluded, the housing expenditure will be zero for all the regions. The Baiga re-builds his house every five or six years and seasonal repairs are made intermittently. Therefore, it has not been possible to calculate even the labour cost of this casual expenditure.

Sorcery and Medicine

Baiga is a medicine man, and a magician himself. But all Baigas are not well versed in magic and medicine. Very few among them have inherited or learnt the art of diagnosing and curing the disease. The Baiga technique of preventing and curing disease is based upon a faith that almost all the diseases are due to evil spirits or the wrath of gods. In both preventive and curative methods, the Gunia (Sorcerer) attempts to please gods or ward off evil spirits through magic and sacrificial offerings to the village diety. Grain, coconut, a piece of cloth, eggs, chickens, fowls, goat or pig and liquor are the common articles used in preventing, diagnosing or curing a disease. The quantity and kind of these articles differ according to the nature and intensity of the disease in question. The *gunia* who acts as priest, invariably gets liquor to be offered to gods and also for himself.

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*See C.P. and Berar Forest Manual Vol. I, p. 69.

The Baiga system of curing disease does not exclude medicine altogether. Besides Jhara-phooki (sorcery), some *gunias* enjoy great reputation for their knowledge of herbs, roots, leaves, and seeds of medicinal value. In olden days when the allopathic system had not reached the rural areas, Baigas were called for regular herbal treatment even in urban places like Mandla, Balaghat and Kawardha. And even now, some *gunias* retain their reputation for diagnosing and curing diseases of the worst type.

The Baiga's expenditure on health and medicine is of two types—offerings to gods or *gunia*, and herbs and roots. The survey of 350 families revealed that nearly 0.16 per cent of the total cost of living was spent on sacrificial offerings and 0.12 per cent on indigenous medicines, or about one rupee per family per year. Since the Baiga believe in magic-cure and since modern medical facilities are not available to them, their expenditure on medicine is quite low. But in recent times the hold of sorcery is loosening and wherever medical facilities are available the Baiga have availed them. Their aversion to allopathic medicines is also decreasing. Shri Bapat, Secretary, Banvasi Seva Mandal who regularly takes his medical van to Baiga region has recorded that the general view that the tribals do not believe in medicine and have recourse to magic even at the cost of suffering, is far from the truth. Ages of negligence have made them depend upon magic and mystic ways, but whenever any herbal medicine or any other cure was available, they had shown their willingness to take it and get rid of the disease. Expenditure in future medical schemes of Baiga uplift, it was suggested by doctors of Mawai, Bicchia, Baihar and Dindori, should be more on the preventive measures than on curative medicines. For most of the diseases from which Baigas suffer are either due to nutritional deficiency or bad sanitation and defective personal hygiene. Until such measures are taken, the Baiga will continue to spend on magic and sorcery and the disease will remain a mysterious phenomena for them.

Social and Religious Expenditure

Social and religious expenses have significant place in Baiga's pattern of expenditure. They are an essential part of his social fabric. Tear it off and the Baiga's life will remain a monotonous fulfilment of the food quest. Social ceremonies make his life worth living and the performance of rituals gives him confidence and courage to face the hazards of forest life. Festivals and feasts are organised in response to seasonal cycles. They are an expression of his joy over good harvest or a happy event in the village. Baiga festivals and ceremonies, as stated earlier are not associated with his religious beliefs. Therefore, the amount of expenditure to be incurred on them is generally not fixed. It varies according to the capacity of the family and the crop conditions in a particular year. But the manner and the time of spending are decided by the prevailing conventions. For example, the Dassehra festival in which village parties exchange visits and entertain on reciprocal basis are not of compulsory nature. If the crop is not good, it may be dropped altogether or the celebration may be on a moderate scale. Then the amount of social expenditure also depends upon the size of a particular village, nearness of other Baiga villages and the social traditions of the villages: since liquor is an important item in festivals, nearness of the liquor shop influences the amount of social expenditure to a considerable extent. The nearer the liquor shop, the greater the possibility of indulgence and the higher the expenditure on celebrations. Even relations come from distant places—15 to 20 miles afar. Since the whole village stands host to the visiting party, the expenses on drinking and feasting are shared by all the families of the village.

There is, however, a different category of social ceremonies on which expenditure does not vary much. For example, some expenses on death ceremony are obligatory. Coffin, liquor and communal feast are approximately the same irrespective of the status of the successors of the deceased or the deceased himself. Similarly a part of expenditure on marriage is also non-variable. Baiga's expenditure on birth is negligible. Birth is not considered a social event nor do any ceremonies follow it. But just contrary is the case of religious ceremonies. Expenditure on them is of an obligatory character. The kind and quantity of articles to be offered to gods or to the Gunia are prescribed by social laws. The time for celebrating religious functions is also fixed. For example the time of the Bidri ceremony precedes sowing. Hareli festival is celebrated after sowing.

Baiga's short memory, inability to classify his expenditure and the interwovenness of social and tribal ceremonies render it difficult to attain even approximate statistical accuracy in his social and religious expenditure. Baiga hestitates to disclose his social secrets for he stands charged with extravagance on social ceremonies Moreover, such statistical enquiry needs an insight into their centuries old traditions and beliefs—a task possible only for those who enter into their brotherhood—really a difficult job for an investigator, a casual visitor that he is.

Despite these handicaps an attempt was made to collect data pertaining to Baiga's social expenses in four districts—Mandla, Balaghat, Bilaspur and Drug. The enquiry disclosed that of the total expenditure of Rs. 1,53,111/- incurred by 350 families, Rs. 4.081/12/- were spent on social and religious ceremonies. The average annual expenditure per family comes to Rs. 11/10/- or 2.7 per cent of the total expenditure of 350 families. The following table gives information about social expenditure in a summary form :—

EXPENDITURE ON SOCIAL & RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES

Region	Number of families surveyed	Total Expenditure		Expediture on ceremonies		Percentage to Total Expenditure	Average Expenditure per family	
		Rs.	As.	Rs.	As.		Rs.	As.
Baihar	55	22,193	2	575	0	2.6	10	7
Baiga Chak	91	39,884	2	1,523	8	3.8	16	11
Dindori	57	24,900	4	405	8	1.6	7	5
Mandla	68	37,947	0	886	12	2.3	13	0
Mungeli	52	16,962	7	651	0	3.8	12	8
Kawardha	27	11,224	2	40	0	0.3	1	7
	350	1,53,111	1	4,081	12	2.7	11	10

The social expenditure, as the table shows, varies from 0.3 per cent of the total expenditure in Kawardha to 3.8 per cent in the Baiga Chak. It is 1.6 per cent in Dindori, 2.6 per cent in Baihar, 2.3 per cent in Mandla and 3.8 per cent in Mungeli. These variations, however, do not indicate any difference in the ceremonies and beliefs of the Baiga of various regions. Since social customs and practices are basically the same in all the regions, differentials are mainly due to crop conditions and the number of marriages celebrated during the year in a particular region. Thus, variations are more of an accidental nature rather than indicative of any fundamental difference in the social ceremonies observed in different regions. For example, out of 23 marriages, celebrated in the whole Baiga area, 15 were arranged in the Baiga Chak and Mungeli tehsil which record the highest percentage of social expenditure, namely 3.8. In these regions the average social expenditure per family is also high nearly Rs. 16-11-0 in the Baiga Chak and Rs. 12-8-0 in the Mungeli tehsil.

Expenditure on Marriage

Further analysis of Baiga's social budget brings certain interesting facts to light and disproves some notions commonly held about the Baiga's social life. It is widely believed that a Baiga spends lavishly on marriage ceremonies. But the survey shows that on an average the Baiga family does not spend more than 2.7 per cent of its total expenditure on marriage. Thus, marriage expenses are not very high and may fluctuate from year to year, in the budget of his total expenditure. However, amongst the items of social and religious expenses, marriage certainly figures most prominently. Of the total socio-religious expenses 78.1 per cent is incurred on marriage, 21.6 per cent on other social ceremonies and .03 per cent on religious ceremonies and rituals. It is thus clear that Baigas do not spend much on religious and social ceremonies ; while the marriage is an important item in their social budget. But it must be remembered that in the total expenditure budget, marriage expenses are responsible only for 2.1 per cent amount. The following statistical analysis depicts the relative importance of different items of social and religious expenditure.

Nature of Expenditure	Amount or Percentage
Total amount of expenditure of the Families surveyed.	Rs. 1,53,111 1 0
Total amount of expenditure on marriage, social and religious ceremonies.	Rs. 4,081 12 0
Expenditure on marriage	Rs. 3,189 0 0
Percentage to total amount of expenditure.	2.1 per cent
Percentage to total expenditure on social and religious ceremonies.	78.1 per cent

Name of Expenditure	Amount or Percentage
Expenditure on religious ceremonies.	Rs. 10 14 0
Percentage to total social and religious expenditure.	0.3 per cent
Expenditure on social ceremonies and recreation.	Rs. 881 14 0
Percentage to social and religious expenditure.	21.6 per cent

Marriage expenditure being the most important item in the social budget (not in the total expenditure) of the Baiga, has to be analysed further. The expenditure on marriage is partly obligatory and partly optional. It is at the option of the Baiga to celebrate or postpone marriage in a particular year. Much depends upon the condition of harvest. The amount to be spent on celebration also depends upon the economic status of the parties concerned. The kind of marriage celebrated also determines the scale of expenditure. All full dress legal marriages entail more expenditure than the secondary type of marriages like widow marriage, marriage with a deserted wife, marriage by elopment or *lamsena* marriage. However, there are certain customs and practices according to which a Baiga family must incur a minimum amount of expenditure on an average type of marriage ceremony. A communal feast, clothes for the bride and bride price (*sook*) are unavoidable items in the marriage of a son.* Economic information collected about 23 marriage ceremonies (year 1951-52) reveal the proportion of money spent on different items. Nearly 34.3 per cent of the total marriage expenses is spent on clothes (Rs. 48/8/- average expenditure on clothes per marriage), 27.605 per cent (Rs.39/1/-per marriage) on grain. 25 per cent (Rs. 36/4/- per marriage) on liquor, 4.26 per cent (Rs. 5/11/-) on *sook* and 8. 36 per cent (Rs. 11/14/-) on miscellaneous items like spices, ornaments, drums etc. The average expenditure per marriage comes to about Rs. 141/7/. The following table shows the relative position of different items in a marriage budget :—

The manner in which Baigas celebrate marriage has been discussed earlier in Chapter 3.

ANALYSIS OF MARRIAGE EXPENDITURE.

Items of Expenditure	Percentage to the total expenses on marriage.	Average Expenditure per marriage.		
		Rs.	As.	Ps.
Clothes	34.306	48	8	0
Grain	27.605	39	1	0
Liquor	25.63	36	4	0
Bride price	4.26	5	11	0
Miscellaneous	8.36	11	14	0

The type of the marriage, social status of the parties and the conditions of harvest no doubt introduce disparity in the scale of marriage expenditure; yet there appears to be an average standard of marriage from which actual expenditure does not deviate too much. Classification of 23 marriage ceremonies into expenditure groups revealed that the expenditure on 18 marriages ranged between Rs. 100-200. Only in the case of two ceremonies the expenditure exceeded Rs. 251/-/-. The following table exhibits the position :-

CLASSIFICATION OF MARRIAGE CEREMONIES INTO EXPENDITURE GROUPS.

Expenditure-Group	Number of marriages under the Group.
Below Rs. 100	8
Between Rs. 100—200	10
Between Rs. 201—250	3
Between Rs. 251—300	1
Above Rs. 300	1
	23

Expenditure on Death Ceremony

Death ceremony is another important social event in a Baiga family. Though an occasion of sorrow, it involves some expenditure. The Baiga believe that death occurs due to some evil spirit or the wrath of some God. The services of a Gunia are utilised to defeat the evil spirit or propitiate the God. If a tiger has eaten a person the Baghesurpat must be worshipped and a long ceremony has to be gone through to lay the dead man's soul at peace and to prevent the tiger from attacking the village in future. In the case of ordinary death, the main items of expenditure are : cloth for coffin, a little sweet or a coin, to be put into the mouth of the deceased, oil and turmeric, dead man's *hasia,** *Supa,*† *tuma,*‡ basket and *Khanta,*** tobacco and *chakmak.*†† A feast of goat and liquor is given to the mourners on the tenth day. But the expenditure on death ceremony is not uniform at all places and on all deaths. If the village consists of a large Baiga population, the expenses on the feast will definitely be higher. Similarly the status of the family or of the deceased also influences the amount of expenditure. Below are given statements of three death ceremonies in Dhurkatta village (year 1951) of the Baiga Chak.

(1) Death ceremony of Pharki Baiga, father of Motilal, liquor contractor of Dhurkatta—

Liquor	Rs.	108	0	0
Grain	Rs.	60	0	0
Cloth	Rs.	10	0	0
Miscellaneous	Rs.	5	0	0
	Rs.	183	0	0

(2) Death ceremony of Loharu's father resident of Dhurkatta—

Liquor	Rs.	60	0	0
Grain	Rs.	72	0	0
Cloth	Rs.	7	0	0
Miscellaneous	Rs.	2	0	0
	Rs.	151	0	0

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* Sickle.

† Winnowing fan.

‡ Gourd.

** Digging Stick.

†† Flint.

(3) Death ceremony of Motilal's brother of Dhurkatta-

Liquor	Rs.	84	0	0
Grain	Rs.	50	0	0
Cloth etc.	Rs.	5	0	0
	Rs.	139	0	0

All the three statements relate to a village which is predominantly a Baiga village, the status of the families involved is considerably high for Pharki was a liquor shop contractor and occupied a leader's position among the Baiga of the Chak. Moreover, location of a liquor shop in the village itself was an important cause of heavy drinking. Consequently the expenditure on death ceremonies appears to be unusually high. For the average type of Baiga family the normal expenditure on a death ceremony will be as follows :—

Liquor	Rs.	20	0	0
Grain	Rs.	30	0	0
Cloth	Rs.	5	0	0
Miscellaneous	Rs.	2	0	0
	Rs.	57	0	0

Baigas try to meet this expenditure from the current budget as far as possible. If borrowing becomes unavoidable, it is then arranged among the tribesmen. During the course of enquiry into the causes of debt, death was not found to be a cause of borrowing of any considerable importance for if the circumstances do not permit, the expenditure is curtailed to the minimum. For example Dhuira (Silpuri village) died when his son was only 12 years old. The ceremony was performed very economically—liquor Rs. 15/-, Grain Rs. 10/- and other expenses Rs. 3/-. It is clear from this case that expenditure on death ceremony varies according to the circumstances of the family and there are no hard and fast rules regarding expenditure on it except certain items.

Expenditure on festivals

Dassehra is an important festival among the Baiga. It gains its importance by being the occasion for the Bida ceremony. With Dassehra starts the season for dancing. It falls in October when rains end. Villages exchange visits and they feast whenever possible. Describing the significance of Dassehra among the Baiga, Elwin writes, 'For the Baiga, however, apart from general dancing and jollity in sympathy with their neighbours, the Dassehra ceremony is associated with public health. It is the great prophylactic, a sort of sanitation drive along the supernormal boundaries of the world.' On Dassehra day the gunia drives away all hostile spirits from the village. Offerings are also made to Thakur Deo, a chicken to the Deshahi* and a coconut to the Ghut.* The Bida ceremony is a complicated affair. The main articles required on this occasion are: a few bamboo sticks, *sarai* bark, a number of *trisuls* made of bamboo sticks, a little of *sendur,* a black bangle, some quantity of parched grain, broken brooms, twentyone nails, and a coconut. Besides sacrificial offerings, communal feasts are expensive items: The neighbouring villages exchange visits and arrange feasts on a reciprocal basis. The whole village stands host to the visiting party. There is reckless drinking and gluttonic feasting on this occasion. Actual expenditure on such a feast largely depends upon the number of persons visiting the village, nearness of the liquor shop and social relations of the village standing host. On an average type of Dassehra feast the expenditure ranges between Rs. 60/- and Rs. 100/- including grain and liquor. But the feast is reciprocated later on by the visiting party. The expenditure is thus recompensated at a later stage.

Laru Kaj

Another ceremony over which the Baiga spend lavishly is the Laru Kaj. This is an elaborate arrangement whereby a sick man, believing his disease to have been brought upon him by Narayan Deo, dedicates a pig to this deity, preserves it with care and honour for three years.† It then becomes Narayan Deo's Swari and must be well guarded and given the best food. When three years have passed it is actually sacrificed to Narayan Deo. The family arranges a big feast on a Saturday in which friends and relations come from far and near. The family prepares plenty of Kodi and rice and offers sufficient quantity of liquor to the invitees. Narayan Deo in the Mandla District is considered a disease-demon who from time to time attacks a family, takes up residence on the threshhold of a house and must be appeased by the dedication and ultimate sacrifice of a pig. A pig (Laru) is dedicated to Narayan Deo for getting rid of a number of diseses ; sore eyes, sore throat, rheumatic pains, snake-bite, fever etc. A Laru is always dedicated if any woman in the house is barren, whereupon she is supposed to have children. The Laru Kaj is thus a prophylactic against disease, as well as a cure. It belongs to the medical science of the Baiga rather than to their

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***A tribal god.**

†For detailed description of the ceremony see Shamrao Hivale's 'The Pradhans of Upper Nerbudda Valley' Pp. 125-140.

theology.* The ceremony involves heavy expenditure, for quite a large number from 60 to 70 persons partake in it and heavy drinking is its common feature. The following is an approximate estimate of commodities consumed on the occasion :

1	Pig (fat and big enough).
3-4	Chickens.
1¼	Maunds coarse grain (Kodai)
15	Seers pulses.
20	Seers Rice.
60-70	Bottles of liquor.
3-4	Seers of Salt.
2	Seers Other spices.
1¼	Seers Oil
5-7	Seers Vegetables and tubers.

The actual quantity of articles consumed varies from place to place and family to family. Many factors influence the actual expenditure incurred. The number of members of the family and its relations attending the ceremony, number of Baigas in the village, number of Baigas in the neighbouring villages and above all the resources of the family determine the scale of arrangements.

Communal feasts

The Baiga have also to arrange communal feasts by way of penalty or punishment for breaking tribal laws and customs. If a Baiga has married a non-Baiga girl or eloped with another's wife, or has flouted the code of marriage in any way he stands punished by the panchayat usually with a communal feast followed by liquor. Baigas observe certain laws regarding dining with other tribes and any transgression of these laws has to be atoned with a feast to the tribesmen. Certain diseases resulting in worms in any part of the body, are considered the result of some sin committed by the victim of the disease. He must, therefore, atone for it by giving a feast to the tribesmen. It is known as Bhagavan Dand—a punishment given by God. Bokha Baiga of Sonph village (Mandla tehsil) had to meet such punishment and had incurred an expenditure as detailed below :

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*See Elwin : Op. Cit. p. 407.

EXPENDITURE ON BHAGVAN DAND.

	Rs.	As.	Ps.
Cash to the priest (Ser Mian)	1	4	0
Foodgrains for feast	16	0	0
Pig for feast	8	0	0
Liquor for feast	12	0	0
Miscellaneous expenses	3	0	0
Total ...	40	4	0

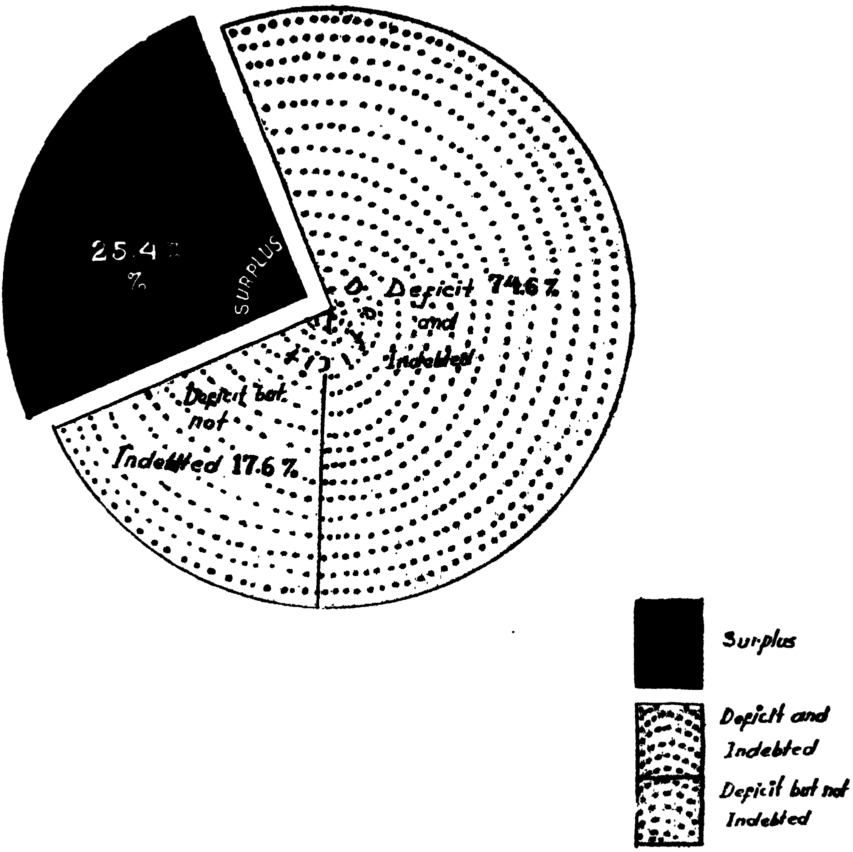
Expenditure on guests

The Baiga are very hospitable and large-hearted hosts. They are all out for welcoming and entertaining their guests. The limited resources or the possibility of facing the hardship of deficit does not discourage them from spending lavishly on guests. Besides a large number of relations which each family has, any elderly man or gunia of fame is everybody's guest. Feasting and drinking are the common features of entertaining the visitor. Enquiries disclosed that every Baiga family incurs some expenditure, say Rs. 3/- to 4/- annually on guests. Liquor must invariably be offered to the visitor joined by some other elders of the village. Where the Baiga villages are clustered nearby, the expenditure on this item goes still higher. If the family occupies a high status in the tribe or if it has a large number of relations, the visits by guests are more frequent. Since guests come walking from long distances, their stay lasts 3 to 5 days particularly when it is not the time of ploughing or sowing. If there is a liquor shop in the village itself or nearby, the attraction to prolong the stay is still stronger. Average expenditure per visitor staying for 3 to 4 days comes to about 9 to 12 meals and 2 bottles of liquor. If the number of relations visiting the family is large, the expenditure increases proportionately.

Recreation

The Baiga break monotony and the hum drum of their daily life by organising dances and hunting parties. They use special dresses for dance which involve some extra expenditure, of course of a capital nature. Both men and women participate in the performance. Naturally in order to get into the happy mood and to enjoy the thrill of the day, they take good meals and liquor drinking dominates the scene. Friends and

SURPLUS OR DEFICIT FAMILY BUDGETS.



guests are also entertained on such occasions. Expenses on recreation are affected by a number of factors. The larger the number of persons participating in a dance, the higher the expenditure. The intensity of joy and one's capacity to drink liquor also influence the amount to be spent. However, it was found that roughly a Baiga family spends 0.3 per cent of its total social expenditure on recreation. If liquor is excluded, the Baiga's expenditure on recreation is practically negligible. But it must be remembered that Baiga's social and religious ceremonies are very much inter-mingled with his recreational arrangements. Since mythical and social beliefs regulate his communal life it is very difficult to make any scientific distinction between his religious and social expenditure. The Dassehra ceremony is associated with the Bida ritual, Laru Kaj is followed by dancing and drinking, and worship of Thakur Deo provides feasting opportunities to the young.

Surplus or deficit family budgets

An analysis of Baiga's sources of income and the items of expenditure revealed the standard of living of the tribe. The net economic position of the tribe has yet to be ascertained. Out of 350 families surveyed, there was an excess of expenditure over income in the case of 261 families – that is, 74.6 per cent of the total number of families were having deficit budgets. In other words only 25.4 per cent families could meet their expenditure or earn some surplus. The following table sums up the economic condition of the Baiga families :—

SURPLUS OR DEFICIT FAMILY BUDGETS

YEAR 1951-52

Total number of families surveyed	350
Number of families having surplus budget	89
Percentage of surplus families to the total number of families surveyed	25.4%
Number of families having deficit budget	261
Percentage of deficit families to the total number of families surveyed	74.6%

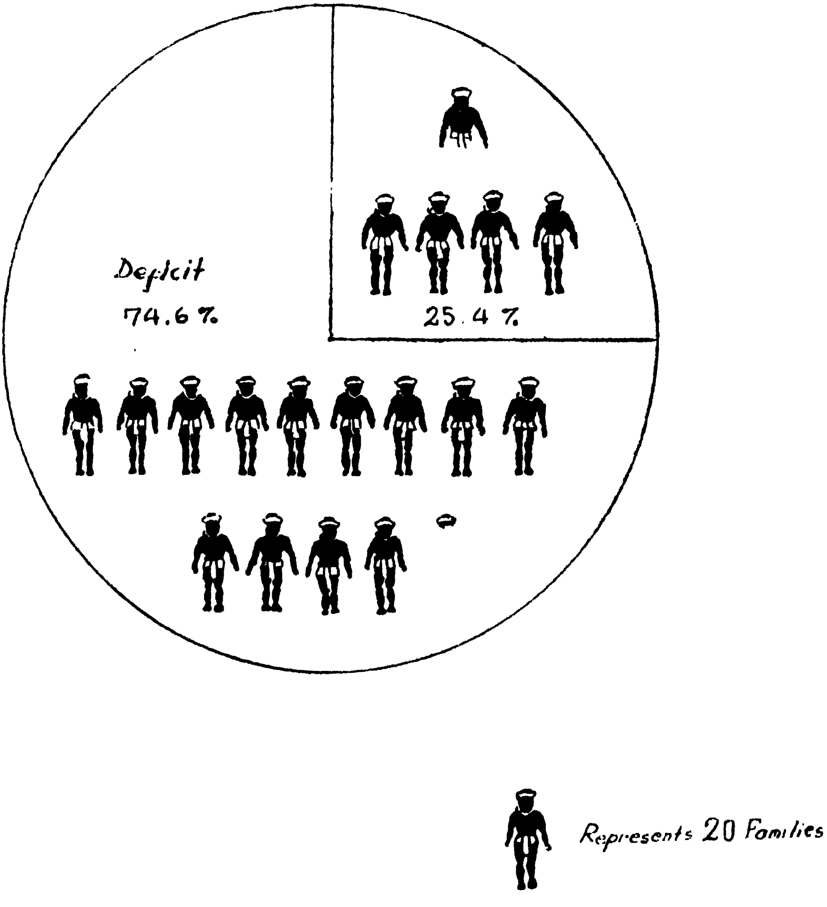
The high percentage of deficit families proves that the tribe is submerged in steep poverty. There are however regional variations in the condition of poverty, for the percentage of deficit families varies between 46.2 in Mungeli tehsil and 90.1 in the Baiga Chak. The following table indicates the regional variations in the percentage of deficit families :—

PERCENTAGE OF SURPLUS OR DEFICIT FAMILIES IN DIFFERENT REGIONS OF BAIGA LAND (YEAR 1951-52)

Region	No. of families surveyed	No. of surplus families	Percentage of surplus families to total number of families surveyed	No. of deficit families	Percentage of deficit families to total number of families surveyed
Baiga Chak	91	9	9.9	82	90.1
Dindori tehsil	57	7	12.3	50	87.7
Mandla ,,	68	18	26.5	50	73.5
Mungeli ,,	52	28	53.8	24	46.2
Kawardha ,,	27	6	22.2	21	77.8
Baihar ,,	55	21	38.2	34	61.8
Whole Baiga land	350	89	25.4	261	74.6

The economic and social conditions prevailing in different regions explain the variations in the percentage of deficit families. The people of Baiga Chak (where 90.1 per cent families were having deficit budgets) depend almost solely on agriculture deriving 94.8 per cent of their income from this source. As a result, the average annual income per family in the Chak is the second lowest namely Rs. 273-5-0, while the per capita income is also the lowest namely Rs. 37-13-0. In respect of debt also the position of the Chak is not satisfactory. The average debt per family in the Chak was the second highest and the percentage of indebted families was the highest. The Chak recorded a high expenditure on drink—7.4 per cent of the total cost of living, and Rs. 28-3-0 average expenditure per family, the highest and the second highest in the Baiga land respectively. The villages of Dindori Tehsil where 87.7 per cent families were having deficit budgets, are in line with the villages of the Baiga Chak. Here the people though derive only 45.4 per cent of their income from agriculture, earned the lowest average annual income per family

SURPLUS OR DEFICIT FAMILY BUDGETS.

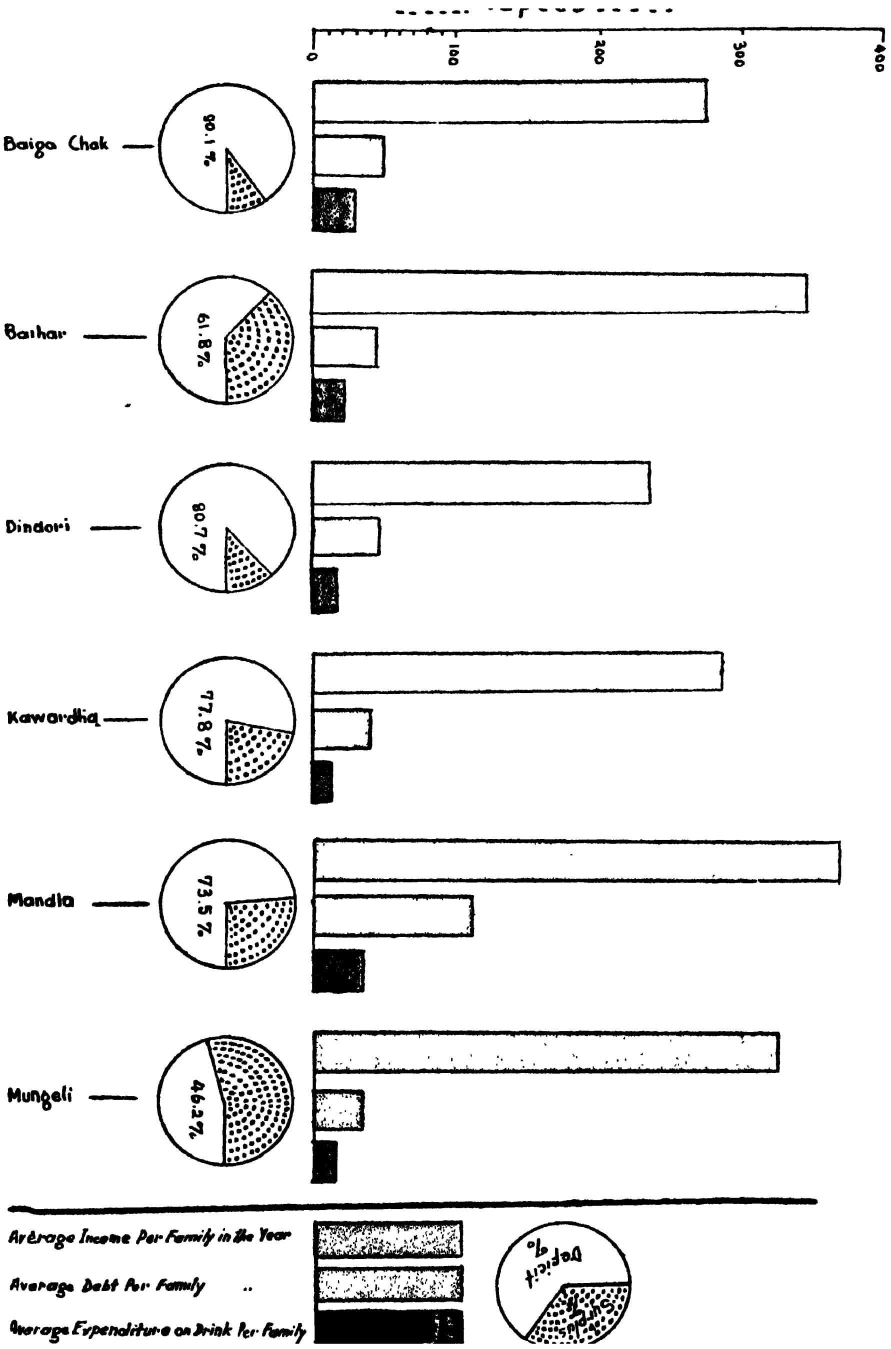


namely Rs. 235/-, and the second lowest per capita income in the Baiga land namely Rs. 40-3-6. The reasons lie in the low fertility of land, contractors' and moneylenders' operations and a large number of ryotwari villages where the aboriginals get less privileges and rights than the forest villages administered by the Forest Department. The expenditure on drink was no doubt low (Rs. 15-12-0 per family or 3.7 per cent of the total cost of living). But the incidence of debt was sufficiently high – the average debt per family (Rs. 47-11-0) was the third highest in the Baiga land, and over 36 per cent families were under debt. The root cause in case of the Dindori tehsil villages appears to be the low per capita income. In Kawardha tehsil 77.8 per cent families were having deficit budgets. The average income per family in this tract was the third lowest namely Rs. 283-3-0. The case of Mandla tehsil villages needs special explanation because here the Baiga earn only 6.8 per cent of their income from agriculture, but they registered the percentage of deficit families as high as 73.5. The tract also recorded the highest average annual income per family namely Rs. 367-9-0 (per capita income Rs. 54-9-0, fourth in order). These facts prove that the income side of the Baiga of Mandla tract is better than others. Therefore the causes of high percentage of deficit families lie in the expenditure side of the family budgets. The average debt per family was the highest in the Baiga villages of Mandla tehsil namely Rs. 109-12-0. The *mahajans* have spread their business in the remotest part of the tract. They supplied 78 per cent of the total loans borrowed by the Baiga of this region—the highest percentage in the Baiga land. The percentage of money loans to total loans was also almost the highest namely 53.1. This proves moneylender's hold over Baigas of Mandla tehsil. As a result, 79.4 per cent of the families were found under debt, and another 2.9 per cent had to borrow, though they could repay their loans. The expenditure on drink further explains the large number of deficit families. The average annual expenditure on drink per family was the highest in the region namely Rs. 32-0-0 or 6.3 per cent of the total cost of living, being the second highest in the whole Baiga land. The wage system prevalent in the region (for Baigas earn 68.8 per cent of their total income from forest work in Mandla region) is largely responsible for the high expenditure on drink. It is a well known fact that in tribal areas the wage payment day is followed by a liquor fortnight. Thus high incidence of debt and drink expenditure sap out the budget, the income side of which records the highest average annual income per family. The villages of Baihar tehsil are similar to those of Mandla. Moneylender's operations and the precarious nature of both agriculture and forest work reduce the net income of the Baiga. In Mungeli tehsil the percentage of deficit families is the lowest namely 46.2. Certain peculiar conditions prevailing in the tract explain this low percentage. A road is being constructed through the Baiga villages which provides a regular source of income to the aboriginal population. 63.4 per cent of the total income was derived from forest and road work. Since the road has not been completed the moneylenders and forest contractors have not reached this tract. For instance, the Baiga of Mungeli villages borrowed only 2.4 per cent of loans from the Mahajan. 50 per cent of the loan transactions were among the Baiga themselves. As a result, the average debt per family was also the lowest in the region namely Rs. 32-5-0. Since the road is still under construction, the wage system has not shown its effect upon the drink habit of the people. The average annual expenditure on drink per family was Rs. 15-12-0, the second lowest amount in the whole Baiga region. Thus high income from road and forest work and the low incidence of debt and drink expenditure explain the low percentage of deficit families in the Mungeli region. The analysis of the regional variations in the number of deficit families brings us to the conclusion: The higher the average annual income per family, the lower the percentage of deficit families in a tract provided the expenditure on debt and drink is not high. Its corollary would be : the greater the incidence of debt and drink in a region, the higher the percentage of deficit families irrespective of high average income per family. The following table exhibits a rough relationship of economic position of the family with indebtedness and expenditure on drink :—

A ROUGH RELATIONSHIP OF INDEBTEDNESS AND EXPENDITURE ON DRINK WITH THE ECONOMIC POSITION OF THE FAMILIES IN DIFFERENT REGIONS.

Region	Percentage of deficit families	Average income per family in the year			Average debt per family			Average expenditure on drink per family		
		Rs.	as.	ps.	Rs.	as.	ps.	Rs.	as.	ps.
Baiga Chak	90.1	273	5	0	50	12	0	28	3	0
Baihar Tehsil	61.8	346	8	0	44	3	0	19	1	0
Dindori Tehsil	87.7	235	0	0	47	11	0	15	12	0
Kawardha Tehsil	77.8	283	3	0	37	1	0	13	9	0
Mandla Tehsil	73.5	367	9	0	109	12	0	32	0	0
Mungeli Tehsil	46.2	323	3	0	32	5	0	15	12	0

A ROUGH RELATIONSHIP OF INDEBTEDNESS AND EXPENDITURE ON DRINK WITH THE ECONOMIC POSITION OF FAMILIES IN DIFFERENT REGIONS



A glance at the over-all position of the whole Baiga land, however, raises certain points which deserve explanation. Out of 350 families, 261 or 74.6 per cent of the total number of families surveyed were having deficit budgets. A question arises : are the findings correct and if so, how the deficit families managed to meet their expenditure ? It may be admitted that certain factors might have vitiated the data about income as well as expenditure in the family budgets. During our tour everyone told us that crops were definitely below the normal due to inadequate and untimely rains. This must have reduced Baiga's normal income. Further the Baiga might have given an under-estimate of their harvest due to procurement policy then in force in the State or fear of enhancement of the land revenue. Apart from these circumstantial factors, there is a tendency among the villagers in general of giving an under-estimate of their crops with a view to demand concessions in land revenue from the Government. And lastly Baiga's ignorance and illiteracy and weak memory for weights and figures might have introduced some inaccuracies in their statements.

On the expenditure side also some factors might have inflated the amount of total expenditure incurred by a family. Baigas could give only a rough estimate of expenditure on different items of consumption. In fact most of them were unable to count even the number of persons in their families. It was therefore not possible for such simple people to give exact figures about their expenditure of the whole year. It is likely some of them might have included the grain loaned out to neighbours in their own expenditure, for they do not treat such advances as loans in the strict sense of the term. Besides, they might have miscalculated the expenditure on cloth because the price of cloth had fluctuated very sharply during the period of investigation.

The above factors might have tainted the actual conditions. But they do not reverse the basic fact that Baigas are steeped in utter poverty. That there is abundant truth in the figures of deficit families (74.6 per cent) is proved by four reasons. Firstly, an enquiry into the debt position of 350 families showed that 57 per cent of them borrowed loans during the year, and that over 85 per cent of these loans were borrowed for maintenance and seed. Thus out of 74.6 per cent deficit families, 57 per cent tried to meet their expenditure through borrowing. The case of remaining 17.6 per cent deficit families is explained by the second fact : whenever the Baiga were short of foodgrains they lived on wild roots, fruits and leaves. Thirdly, our personal observations and the information given by persons living in the Baiga land showed that Baigas had to go without cereal diet for weeks together when the crops were poor. They stated the quantity of grain which they would have consumed normally, if the crops were normal. It was not possible for them to calculate the number of days on which they had to go without cereals. Fourthly, the conditions prevailing in the rural areas prove the truth of our findings. A recent agricultural labour enquiry conducted in this State brought to light the amazing fact that 60 per cent of the family budgets of agricultural labourers showed an excess of expenditure over income, although there was no evidence of indebtedness to explain the excess.* Another enquiry into the conditions of agricultural workers in village Khapri (near Nagpur) conducted by the Government of India, showed that of the 18 agricultural workers' families intensively surveyed, 12 showed excess of expenditure over income—about 67 per cent families had deficit budgets.†

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*Report of the Madhya Pradesh Prohibition Enquiry Committee, 1951, p. 61.

†Report on 'An Enquiry into the conditions of Agricultural Workers in Khapri in Madhya Pradesh State' (1951), Pp. 13 and 42.

CHAPTER X

DRINK HABIT

Craving for drink traced to its origin goes back to the dawn of human society. The use of alcoholic drink has extended over virtually all parts of the earth. In primitive societies generally alcoholic beverages have been used variously as a common drink, in ceremonial festivals and to stimulate merry making. The ancient civilisations had their beverages, many of them alcoholic. Ancient Babylonian records from the time of Sargon I depict the process of brewing beer from cereals and show plainly that beer was used as a household beverage. The code of Hammurabi (C. 2100 B.C. practised in Babylon) regulated the activities of tevernkeepers. The process of making wine and beer was known to Egyptians of Old Empire.* Hebrews too were familiar with it.† Wine making was a major industry in Greek and Roman civilisations. The ancient Greek spoke of the ambrosia and the nectar of the Gods, drinks fit for celestial creatures.‡ The ancient Hindu scriptures contain references of alcoholic drinks.**

Liquor in Baiga Culture

The Baiga mythology has a very interesting account of the origin of Mahua liquor.(††) It is said when Bhagvan called Bhimsen to make the wobbling earth fix, the latter asked for food. He ate nearly twenty-five bags of rice and twelve sacks of lentils, further supplemented with twelve sacks of grain. When he had finished them all he requested Bhagvan to give him something to drink. Bhagvan directed him to the forest to find some liquor there. Bhimsen made a frantic search and came to a mahua tree on which many birds were sitting and nodding their heads. Amazed to see them nodding, Bhimsen climbed up the tree and there he saw a hollow in the tree full of mahua liquor. Out of curiosity he tasted it and found it to his liking. He drank and drank, and his head began to nod also. Ultimately he joined the company of birds and they all nodded their heads. 'Then he filled twelve gourds full of the liquor and brought it back for Bhagvan to drink. They sat down. Bhagvan and the wind (Pawandaseri) and the crow (Karicag), and they drank the liquor out of leaf cups.*

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* See Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences. Vol. 9-10, p. 496.

† See Genesis (IX : 20-21)

‡ See Wilson D. Wallis : An Introduction to Anthropology', p. 208.

** Refer (a) Vrihaspati Samhita, (Gaikwad Edition, Oriental series), p. 321.
(b) Manusmriti, 5-56.
(c) Charak Samhita, Chapter 24.
For world-wide use of alcohol refer 'General Anthropology' by Franz Boas, p. 255-260.

†† See 'The Baiga' by Elwin, p. 311.

It is thus widely believed that 'Bhagvan himself sent the great giant Bhimsen to find Mahua liquor before the foundation of the World, and thus established it as a necessary ingredient in all Baiga worship.' There is hardly any religious ceremony or ritual of the Baiga in which Mahua liquor is not used. Every Baiga firmly believes that liquor is not only a religious necessity but also a means to please the gods. The priest is unable to probe into the world of spirits without first drinking well. Liquor is, therefore, offered to god as well as the priest. Their principal diety. Bara Deo, is worshipped in the month of Jeth (May), when goats, fowls, coconuts, and the liquor of the new Mahua crop are offered to him.† Thakur Deo is the oldest and most honoured of the gods. He is the lord of the village and its protector. 'He is the Thakur of the whole world.' Liquor, a lamp and Sarai gum are offered to him. Dharti Mata is loved as well as worshipped. Baigas worship her in the month of Jeth at the Bidri ceremony when the legend about the discovery of liquor by Bhimsen is recited along with other *mantras* and liquor is freely sprinkled on the pile of seeds to be offered to Thakur Deo and finally sown in Dharti Mata. The ceremony invariably ends with communal drinking. An orthodox Baiga will not take a drop of liquor without first dropping a few drops on the ground in Dharti Mata's honour.

Liquor is an important item in all the ceremonies connected with death. In Tijajahavan, third day of death, the mourners assemble and drink. On the tenth day a feast of goat and liquor is given to all the mourners. When a man is killed by a tiger the rites are much more elaborate and liquor assumes greater importance in the Mati Uthana Ceremony. The person who acts as a tiger is given liquor. He spits it out on the nails which are supposed to bind the mouth of the tiger. The ceremony is followed by a communal feast of Kodai and Mahua liquor. In the end the widow stands in the river or stream, her father behind her on the bank, her mother in front of her in the water. Other near female relations stand nearby. The widow's mother breaks her widow daughter's glass bangles and then she removes silver ornaments. When this is done the widow's father brings liquor and gives her first and then to mother and others. The ceremony is known as Churi Phodna.

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* Like Baigas, the Bondos of Orissa trace the discovery of ardent spirit (Mahua Liquor) to Mahaprabhu himself. He once called Soma Bodnaik and told him 'This is the Bosisum (Bassia Latifolia). Eat the flowers and fruit and feed your children on it. You will get drunk on the juice. It is the tree of plenty and delight.'

(The Bondo Highlander by Elwin, p. 59).

The Maria Gonds also have a similar legend : An ancient hero came to a mahua tree with a hole full of water beneath it, into which many flowers had fallen. He tasted the water and soon he was singing and dancing like birds sitting around the hole. (Maria Murder and Suicide by Elwin, p. 132.)

† Russell and Hiralal : op. cit. Vol. ii., p. 85.

Liquor has religious and social significance in the marriage ceremony too. The negotiations start with offering of liquor to girl's father. The boy and his father, besides other things take sufficient quantity of liquor to the girl's house. Then the girl's father takes a cupful of liquor and carries it into the house. He offers a few drops to Dulha Deo, to Bhitraha Deo, to Karirat, to Bhavani Mata, to Narayan Deo, to the ancestors living by the hearth, to whatever there is of holy and numinous in the house, and says, 'This boy and this girl belong to you: Show us what are we to do ?' The father then goes to his daughter and says 'shall I drink or not ?' Then she gives her consent. her father goes out and begins to drink with the boy's party and others.

In Mandla area the procedure is slightly different. When the girl has given consent and greetings have been exchanged, the girl's father asks, 'Is it to be one leg or two legs ?' meaning are we to have one or two rupees worth of liquor ?' All the villagers then come together. and they celebrate the Sagai* in which liquor drinking is freely indulged. At the time of actual marriage, Chiksa ceremony is performed in which the bride and bridegroom are taken to ant hills. A little square with flour and turmeric is traced in front of ant hills. The *dosis* (male attendants of the bride and bridegroom) offer incense, two pice, some liquor and *chila roti*† to ant hills. The party then drinks a little and bride's brother rides the elephant made of cots, the bride comes and touches elephant's feet. The elephant is thereafter put in a corner and someone gives it a little liquor to drink and removes it left ear. There is another ceremony of a mock fight between the brides' and bridegrooms' party. Boys stretch a *dhoti* between the parties, the participants wave their axes in the air, dance and shout. From time to time they lay their axes at the feet of bride or bridegroom. Then suddenly the bridegroom dashes across the *dhoti* stretched in his way ;

(*) **Betrothel.**

(†) **Fried bread.**

overwhelms the bride, puts a ring on her third finger, picks her up and covers her with the cloth. As they stand together the *dosi* (a male relation) ties their cloth in a knot. When the bride and bridegroom so tied return to the house alongwith the party, the *dosi* pours a few drops of liquor on the knot and undoes it. Again before proceeding for the Bara Bhawar the *dosi* brings a bottle of liquor and reties the knot. At *tikawan* ceremony all wash the feet of the bride and bridegroom with water, then put turmeric and rice first on the *Kalsa*,* then on the *marna pole*.† then on the *Sigh* (liquor pot) and then on the forehead of the happy pair.‡ Besides the ritualistic importance of liquor in marriage, its social importance too is infinite. Marriage ceremony is full of fun, dance and enjoyment. Everyone tries to enjoy the most. It is, therefore, no surprise that the marriage day is a day of drunkards. For what is there, say the Baiga, in a marriage ceremony for others except drinking and dancing. While the bridal pair and *dosis* and *suasins* are busy in performing rituals and worship, other carry on drinking unceasingly. The leaf-cup moves round, round and round till everyone has drunk to his full capacity. His financial condition determines the quantity to be supplied. But there is a minimum which must be met with by everyone. On average Rs. 50-60 are spent on liquor at the time of a marriage. The expenditure, though high in view of Baiga's income, is after all incurred on an event which comes only once in his life. It lends him into a roaring fun which finds expression in marriage songs like this :—

On the hill the Mahua tree roars in the storm.
In the valley the wind sounds in the bamboos.
Along the road Bhimsen is shouting.
In the Marua the drunkards are roaring out a song
At a wedding the bottle with the broken neck,
Goes round and round and round.

(*Matwari Song*).

Mahua liquor has a still more important place in Baiga's social life. The leaf-cup is a medium of social intercourse. It creates and sustains friendship. Whenever two bossom friends visit a bazar their intimacy finds expression in joint drinking ; old friends' accidental

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***A big pot.**

†Marriage pole

‡The description is based on a marriage ceremony witnessed by Elwin in village Pandur op. cit p. 273-81.

meeting culminates in a mutual exchange of liquor cups. A casual meeting between two strangers at the liquor-shop may lead to permanent friendship. A happy drink is the best form of *rapprochement* between estranged neighbours or friends. Thus, liquor has a cementing force in Baiga's social relations. In community life too its role is not less important. All tribal gatherings or panchayats start with or end in drink. Let some elderly Baigas assemble and the liquor cup will join their company invariably. Even ordinary deliberations are followed by mild drinking. All hospitality and reception to the guest will remain dry if liquor has not been served well. Neither the host will feel satisfied about his duty towards the guest nor will the guest enjoy his stay well. Visit by a relation is a signal for marry making and it continues for three to five days. The Baiga mukaddam of Ajgar who accompanied our party to Dhurkatta stayed there for four days and was not allowed to return by his relations who filled him with liquor all the time. A Baiga family spends on an average Rs. 3-4 on the entertainment of guests and visitors. Personal enquiries revealed that Baigas consider it a moral duty to entertain their guests to the best of their ability. The husband tests his wife's loyalty and sincerety towards himself through the care and welcome of his guests by the latter. An erring wife can be excused for all wrongs except the negligence of guests. Naturally a Baiga must spend an adequate amount on liquor for his guests.

In dances and festivals drinking is indispensable. 'How can there be rythm in our dance, argue the Baiga, without enough liquor in our belly ? The Baiga of Dhurkatta who gave a dance performance before our party pointed out that a dancer's legs would not move unless he has drunk some liquor. All Baiga dances, therefore, begin with drink. Not only men, but women also drink in a happy mood. It is a pleasant surprise to see a husband offering drink to his wife amidst a big congregation. One can see all the delicacies even in this public drinking. The Bilma dance makes them wild for drink. It starts late in the night and goes on till dawn. Everybody participates in it, men and women mixed together. It is a 'wildly confused riotous performance'. In other dances too—Karma, Jharpat, Tapadi and Dassera—liquor and drums go together. Then festivals are a good excuse for getting drunk. Baigas observe not only their own festivals but those of Gonds and Hindus too. In March they celebrate Phag; the whole period is spent in drinking and dancing. In the Hareli festival Muria and Binjhwar Baigas of Mandla and Niwas tehsils worship and feed their cows and they drink freely in their honour. The Dasehra festival initiates the season of dancing. The men dance Dassera the women dance the Rina. Villagers exchange visits and offer happy feasts and full drinks.

Liquor is the main item in tribal feasts. In the meetings of tribal panchayats only a few take interest in the proceedings, the majority is interested in drinking. If the panchayat has assembled to decide a case of violation of any tribal custom, the accused stands host. The whole village, however, meets the drink expenditure in case the Panchayat has to decide an inter-village dispute. In most of their verdicts the panchs award penalty of a communal feast and drink. An irregular marriage can be legalised through tribal drinking, an unchaste woman and an adulterer can be excused and their social privileges are restored if they offer liquor to the tribesmen. An order of ex-communication from the tribe can be withdrawn if the guilty person gives a liquor party to the Panchayat. If a Baiga has gone impure because of his imprisonment, or search of his house by a non-Baiga, or has taken food from other except a Gond or there are worms in his wound, a liquor feast to the tribesmen is supposed to purify him. Liquor is thus an important item in all the penalty feasts, and a means of purification.

Magic and drink are inter-twined, if not in Baiga mythology, at least in actual practice. It will be a real discovery to find a *gunia* who is not a drunkard. His excessive drinking has a social sanction behind it for it is believed that a *gunia* invokes his mysterious wisdom and probes into the world of evil spirits with the help of liquor. A well drunk *gunia* looks his own character. His dark and wild appearance with deep eyes shaded with long hair assumes its real colour as liquor enlivens his face. The *gunia* must keep the hypnotic side of his magic strong otherwise how can he be regarded with awe and veneration by other tribes and castes. His ancestors 'could make the dead live, turn themselves at will into wild animals, call the hosts of heaven to their aid, wield monstrous weapons, walk on the water, fly through the air, and win whole villages of girls by their love-magic'. All this he could do with the help of a frail stick of straw and winnowing fan. The *mahua* liquor, says the *gunia*, enables him to bring the whole world of hostile powers into his winnowing fan and helps him to diagnose as to who was responsible for the misdeed. Liquor brings him into the trance of magic whence he can perform wonders. Not long ago, educated Hindus of towns called in a Baiga priest to perform his wizardry in the case of a virulent outbreak of cholera which proved too much for the Brahmans.* It is no wonder then that even caste Hindus offer him liquor when called in to apply his magical remedies. Most of his magical operations are preceded by drink. He is not paid any cash for his services, as the Baiga belief goes that a *gunia* performs his services, not for profit but as fulfilment of his *dharm* (duty). Invariably the *gunia* is given a bottle of liquor and a chicken for his work. Liquor is also used in the initiation ceremony of guniaship. The ceremony consists in taking master's leavings. The older man takes liquor in his mouth, spits it back into a leaf-cup and gives it to his disciple to drink. Baiga is famed for love-magic. He has many charms for a husband who wants to recover an errant wife. In these charms he makes frequent use of liquor. Baiga claims to command special powers over wild animals, particularly a man-eating tiger. Through magic he can bind the mouth of a tiger. He fixes nails in trees in four directions and pours liquor on them. Those who want to make their village safe against the attacks of a tiger call in Baiga priest for doing his magic He is given a goat, one rupee's worth of liquor and two coconuts.

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*See Mandla District Gazetteer, p. 70.

Mahua liquor is used both as preventive as well as curative medicine by the Baiga. Except summer, all other seasons are of extreme degree in the Baiga region. Rains are very heavy ranging between 50 to 60 inches every year. It rains incessantly for weeks together. Due to dense forest and deep valleys, water clogs at many places. The whole area becomes damp and dark with wild vegetation resulting in malarial surroundings. Similarly, during winter the temperature goes as low as 22 degrees Fahrenheit. Periods of frost are also common. The inhabitants are thus exposed to the attacks of cold and pneumonia during winter and to malarial fever after the rainy season.† 'The curse of the aboriginals throughout the province is malaria and the lessening caused by it of the power of resistence to other illness'.‡ Personal enquiries revealed that Baigas sometimes use liquor not as an intoxicant but as a preventive to the attacks of malaria and cold. It is generally believed that *mahua* liquor has antimalarial properties. The Baiga mokkadam of Dhurkatta had an attack of fever during out stay in the village. Immediately he took liquor. In Aunrai village of Baihar tehsil an old woman who had an attack of pneumonia was administered doses of liquor and she felt great relief. N.V. Bapat, Secretary, Banwasi Sewa Mandal, who tours the Baiga areas in a medical van also found that 'wine has protected him (Baiga) from cold and rain and it has made him forget his worries and physical troubles under its enchanting influence.'** In certain other diseases also Baigas prescribe *mahua* liquor. In rheumatism the patient is advised to drink as much liquor as possible. For scorpian bite *mahua* flowers are applied as poultice and some mahua liquor is taken internally.

Baiga's general theory of disease, it may be remembered, is different from ours. According to him hardly any disease is due to natural cause.

***Elwin: op. cit. p. 347.**

†Mandla District Gazetteer. p. 20

‡Grigson : op. cit. p. 02302.

****Paper read at the 'First Tribal Welfare Conference' held at Delhi in June 1952.**

He does not recognise infection or contagion. 'Most disease has its origin either in witchcraft or in the spontaneous and inexplicable hostility of unseen beings'.* Thus Baiga pharmacology and theology are inseparable from each other. For preventing or curing any physical disease he, therefore, propitiates some benevolent god like Thakur Deo, or calls in *gunia* to defeat the hostile spirits through his magic. For example, in the Bida ceremony the *gunia* recalls all the evil spirits that might have haunted the village in the past year, advises on the correct offering to be made to these hostile powers and drives them out of the *mero*—an imaginary boundary of the village. The ceremony is 'the great prophylactic, a sort of sanitation drive along the super-normal boundaries of the world'. Similarly, the Larukaj ceremony is observed to propitiate Narayan Deo. The Gunia prays, 'Maharaj, we put our trust in you. From today may our children live happily.' In both the ceremonies, as stated earlier, liquor plays an important role. Their theological theory of disease goes to the extent of making them believe that Bhagvan himself sends worms into a wound. The whole family is ex-communicated for the curse of God is upon them.' The only remedy is a tribal feast well saturated with *mahua* liquor. The breach of tribal laws is considered an important cause of disease and nothing but a tribal feast of rice and liquor can cure such diseases.

Food Value of Mahua liquor

Baigas ascribe food value also to mahua liquor. 'What is ghee to you is liquor to us' told a Baiga of Silpuri. Their feast is incomplete without drink. Ordinarily a Baiga does not feel energetic without liquor. Special preference is given to fresh distilled liquor for they believe that it has greater food value.† If questioned straightway the Baiga do not claim that liquor is indispensable for their physical existence. But their offhand talks indicate that they consider it an important part of their diet. Baiga's daily diet is monotonous and lacks variety. Liquor, it is said, breaks this monotony and introduces variety in the routine diet of *pej* and *kodia*. Scientists are not clear whether liquor itself has a food value or not. "As a food", remarked the Health Survey Committee, "it requires no digestion before it is absorbed into the blood. It is, however, of little value as an ordinary source of energy because of its harmful effects on the higher nervous centres. Unlike other foods it cannot be stored in the body to be drawn upon as required."‡ On the other side eminent scientist Prof. J.B.S. Haldane believes that country liquor supplies many of the deficiencies in the ordinary grain diet of Indian villagers.* Elwin, too, endorses Maria Gond's view that liquor is both an intoxicant and food.† The Prohbition Enquiry Committee of Madhya-Pradesh (1951) was also of the opinion that those who have to do arduous work in mines or under strenuous condition, needed some alcohol for relaxation and invigoration for the next day's work. The conditions under which they have to work make an occasional drink almost a necessity.‡ However Baiga's own opinion is not so clear on this point. In his talks he admits its casual necessity as food. But in further analysis he confesses that he can do without it. However, it can safely be inferred that (a) drink is considered an important article of consumption by the Baiga ; (b) they are, however, not clear in their minds about the food value of liquor, and (c) that the scientific opinion is also divided on the question whether liquor has any nutritional value.

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*Elwin : op. Cit. p. 360.

†E.S. Hyde, Deputy Commissioner, Mandla (1940) in a letter to Grigson quoted in 'Aboriginal Problem of C.P. and Berar.'

‡Report of the Health Survey and Development Committee (1946), Volume II.

As Means of Relaxation

Occasional drink is, however, a recognised means of relaxation and lessening strain. When a Baiga feels tired after continuous work and tree-felling on the Bewar or under the forest contract, he relaxes himself through drink. A hazardous and long hunt is followed by a cup of liquor. He refreshes himself with drink after an arduous journey over hills and through forests. Baiga's dances are not an easy job. They need rhythmic and yet tumultous movement of body for a long time—often throughout the night. Drink provides them with the required energy and soothes their tired limbs. The Gunia who is on a constant war with the hostile powers, has to undergo heavy psychological strain, and seeks relief in liquor. For the aged drinking is very common as it replenishes lost energy, tranquilizes his memories and fortifies him against the approach of the 'Constables of Death'. The Old Baigas said they did not feel energetic without some alcoholic drink. Even women in their old age begin to drink, particularly the widows, to lessen the psychological tensions of widowhood. It anesthetizes a Baiga against the sorrow of funeral, and the distractions of a family feud. It has a sedative effect, and helps to soften the harshness of life. Moderate drink produces a temporary sense of well being which is technically described as euphoria.

The description of the cultural significance of liquor in Baiga's life will remain incomplete without referring to tribal songs saturated with liquor. A few specimens of such songs are given below

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*Quoted in Grigson's 'Report on Aborginal Problem in C. P. & Berar, p. 491

†Elwin : 'Maria Murder and Suicide' p 131.

‡The Report of the Madhya Pradesh Prohibition Enquiry Committee, p 57.

Jhim Jhim fall the flowers
From the *mahua* on the hill
Into the still they put flowers
The Kalarin* sits on a golden stool
And pours water into the still
Give me a cup for love, Kalarin
And when drunk I'll wander through the village.

Awake, awake, grandfather
Why do you sleep day and night ?
You eat nothing day and night
Awake, grandfather, and eat
From whose hands, my grandfather
Do you get your cup of liquor ?

THE BRIDE.

O ! Kalarin girl
You have enchanted him
with strong liquor
Bought with my money.

KALARIN.

For money I gave strong liquor
I have not killed a cow
It was liquor for your marriage
How have I sinned
As if I had killed a cow ?

The wheat is killed by rust
The pulse is ruined by frost
The *mahua* tree is struck by lightning
And all the liquor vendors weep.

You could get no liquor, brother
And you sold me to get liquor
My being at home troubled you
But you will be happy now you've turned me out.

I daren't go, Hato, I daren't go
My brother will abuse me
I will give your brother liquor
And then I'll take you away.†

***Wife of liquor Shop-keeper.**

†Elwin and Hivale : 'Folk Songs of the Maikal Hills.'

The Baiga liquor contractor in his shop at Dharkutta.

Aboriginals at the sale counter of the liquor shop of Mawai.

Etiquette of drinking

The Baiga etiquette of drink is interesting. Earthen or metal cups are conspicuously absent. A nice little cup made of Sarai or Mohlain leaf quenches his thirst. But he does not lose his sense of proportion. Generally he observes etiquette of drink based on his mythical beliefs and social customs. No strict Baiga will drink without first dropping a few drops of liquor on the ground in honour of the Dharti Mata. Mahua liquor, it is believed, is the gracious gift from heaven and the Baiga must thank Mother-Earth for it. He recites a mantra : I salute you, O Earth ! Again I salute you O Earth ! O Lady of the Evening, stand with your hair dishevelled ! O Sirseti Mai, stand on my throat as I drink.

If it is a congregational drinking, they salute each other with the right hand, before gulping the liquor. The eldest must start drinking first and the younger follow. When father and son drink together, the father begins it first, but they do not share the same leaf cup. He may give his son a sip from his leaf cup. Usually the same cup is shared only by the Samdhis. The etiquette takes a turn of intimacy when two friends of practically equal age enjoy liquor. Before drinking, one offers a sip to the other : probably it adds affection to intoxication. However, at the time of dance, the general convention is that men drink before the women. An elderly person is entrusted with the duty of distributing liquor to the dancers. Later on women dancers are offered liquor by their husbands, or near relations permitted under kinship rules. Even a father-in-law will offer liquor to his son's wife. The person in charge of distribution takes his share at the last preferably in the company of friends of his age. When liquor is drunk individually there is no occasion for observing any social formalities.

Drinking habit of Baiga

There is no published statistical information on drinking among the aboriginals of this State. The annual reports of the Excise Department do not contain any separate data for the aboriginal population. The Excise Enquiry Committees of 1904, 1937 and 1951 did not make any special investigation. Anthropological studies give only a descriptive account of drinking among the tribals. They do not contain any scientific study of the problem from the economic angle. Similarly, the social workers have tried to remove the evil without collecting any statistical data. There is thus an utter lack of economic data on aboriginals, drink habit.

Certain obvious difficulties render the task of collecting information about drink a difficult one. Baiga is extremely reluctant to disclose fact about his drinking habit not because he considers drinking a sin, but due to the fact that his drink habit is looked down upon by the Hindus who occupy a superior position in the society. To save himself from this condemnation he conceals vital information about drinking. Secondly, Baigas do not repose confidence in the enquirer. There are valid reasons for it. Primitives are questioned on drink mostly by the officials of the Excise Department with the intention of detecting illicit distillation. As one starts questioning them they become cautious and hesitant. Suspicion and distrust have their roots in the excise administration. Social factors also stand in the way. Drinking is an intimate matter of Baiga's private and social life. It is an expression of his amorous adventures, seasonal enjoyments and intimacies of unfathomable depth - matters which cannot be enquired through straight questions. Unless the investigator himself enters their world of joy he cannot probe deep into the problem. These difficulties, it appears, had discouraged scientific enquiries in the past. Consequently the Committees and individual investigators have recorded their general observations only. Since these observations are based upon the experiences of those who have lived and worked among the aboriginals, a brief summary of these is given below :

"A Baiga Shikari, who was given a present of twentyfive rupees," records the Mandla District Gazetteer, "was asked how he intended to spend so large a sum. He replied quit seriously that thirteen rupees would be given to a moneylender in satisfaction of an ancient debt, two rupees would be spent on food and clothing and the remaining ten rupees he was going to keep for liquor at the approaching Holi festival".*

"The harvest reaped, any grain that might fall to his share," wrote Forsyth in 1860, "was at once taken to the spirit dealer (who usually combined grain-dealing with his more pernicious trade), and converted into Mahua spirit—gangs of Gonds at this season being constantly to be seen rolling about in a perpetual state of drunkenness, or sitting, blear-eyed, at the door of the bothy, until the last of their earnings had dissipated. This effected they had no recourse but to work during the rest of the season, until sowing time should again arrive, at occasional jobs of wood cutting or road-making, or anything that might turn up, always getting drunk whenever opportunity served."†

Eighty years after this Elwin recorded that "it is not true that the Baiga drink only to get drunk. Liquor not only has a solemn ritual

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***Mandla District Gazetteer, p. 72.**

†Forsyth : 'Highlands of Central India' Pp. 129-30.

significance, but its flavour gives exquisite pleasure. The Baiga are very particular about the quality of their liquor, and sometimes go many miles to a shop where a finer flavour may be obtained. But they do, of course, enjoy the sensation of being drunk. It is an escape from an often all too grim reality. It is a stimulus that releases their most ready wit and choicest stories."* Grigson's experiences with drunk Baigas are interesting. Writing about his Kanha Kisli tour he records that 'on the return journey all the Baiga men and women of Indri, extremely merry on outstill liquor held up my car with bamboos stretched across the road in the manner more usual at Phag or after a tiger has been shot. They were too intoxicated to give answer.' At Sondhar the forest villagers themselves had each brought a bottle of *rasi* liquor from the liquor shop the day before, and intended to drink it after our departure. They all thought outstill liquor preferable and could not understand why Government had suddenly abolished the outstill system or raised the duty on liquor.† Very recently (1952) the Prohibition Enquiry Committee visited areas like the Bastar District, inhabited almost entirely by the aboriginals amongst whom drinking is common and it, also visited Sagar and Damoh where the incidence of drinking is supposed to be small. They were unable to discern any evil effects of drinking on the health of the aboriginals in Bastar nor were they able to ascertain in a comparatively abstemicous District like Sagar any marked superiority in the general physical standards.‡

The general observations about aboriginal's drinking habit, quoted above, it will be noted, are of a conflicting nature, Some have painted a picture of ruinous evil and others have taken a moderate view of the situation. A survey of 350 Baiga families was, therefore, undertaken to ascertain their attitude towards drink, average expenditure incurred on drink and certain cases of abnormal drunkards.

Expenditure on Drink

Out of the total cost of living of Rs. 153,576/8/0 of 350 families, the expenditure on liquor was Rs. 7,774/8/-, or 5.8 per cent of the total maintenance expenses. It may, however, be noted that these figures do not disclose a completely true picture as Baigas were reluctant to disclose facts about their drinking habit due to the reasons discussed earlier.

The total expenditure on drink when divided by the number of families surveyed. (Rs. 7,774/8/- divided by 350), gives the annual average expenditure on drink per family about Rs. 22/3/-, the average total annual expenditure per family being Rs. 387/5/-. It will be interesting to find the relative position of expenditure on liquor in the budget of a family. The following table exhibits the position of expenditure on liquor :

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* Elwin : Op Cit. p.44

† Grigson : 'The Aboriginal Problem in the Balaghat Distt.' Pp. 11-12

‡ Report of the Prohibition Enquiry Committee (M.P.), p. 57.

TABLE SHOWING AVERAGE ANNUAL EXPENDITURE ON DIFFERENT ITEMS IN A FAMILY

Item of Expenditure	Average Annual Expenditure per family on the item
	Rs. As. P.
Food ...	295 1 0
Clothing ...	55 0 0
Housing ...	Negligible
Light and Fuel ...	1 4 0
Medicine ...	1 1 0
Tobacco ...	10 6 0
Liquor ...	22 3 0

The average expenditure on drink per family does not disclose the incidence of drinking in different regions surveyed. The percentage expenditure on drink varies between 3.6 in the Kawardha tehsil to 7.4 in the Baiga Chak. Similarly, there are variations in the per family average expenditure on drink in different regions. The table on the next page indicates the regional variations in expenditure on drink among the Baiga.

The average annual expenditure of a family on drink is highest in the Mandla area—Rs. 32/- (6.3 per cent of the total cost of living in the region). The Baiga Chak also records a high figure, namely Rs. 28/13/- per family (7.4 per cent of the total cost of living). Various factors account for the high incidence of drinking in the Mandla area. Due to extensive forest work (under the Forest contractors) aboriginals earn nearly 68.8 per cent of their income from wages. They are paid

Average Annual-expenditure on liquor per family.

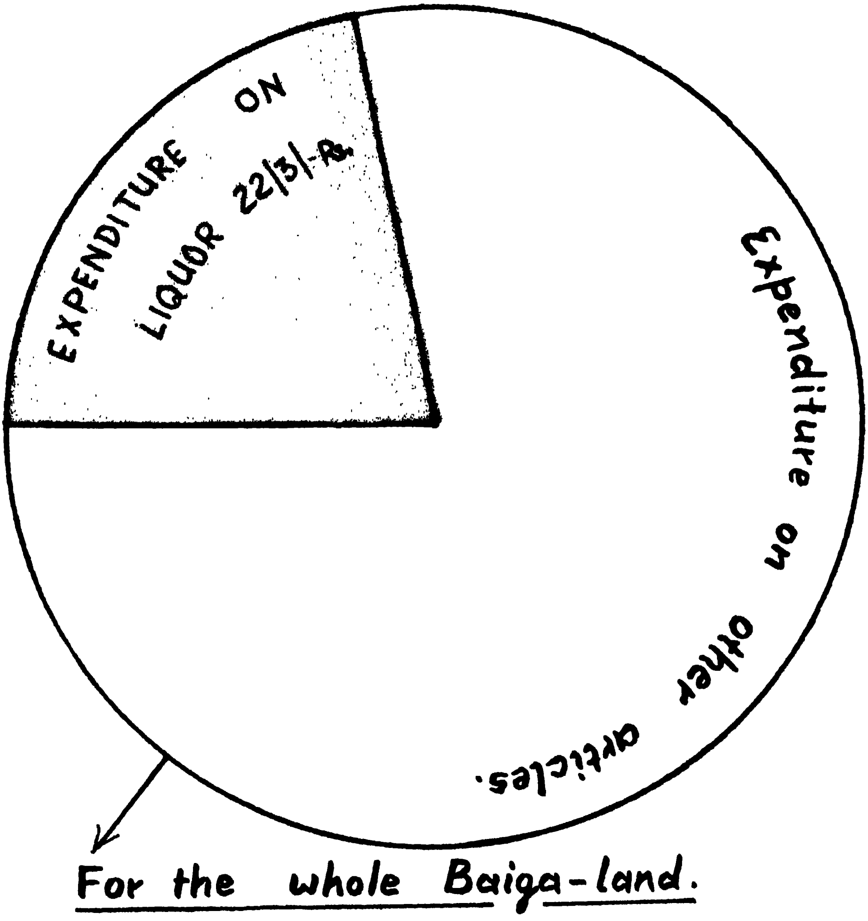

TABLE SHOWING REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN EXPENDITURE ON DRINK

Regions	No. of families Surveyed	Total Expenditure on Maintenance		Expenditure on Liquor		Average Expenditure on drink per family		Percentage of the total cost of living
		Rs.	As.	Rs.	As.	Rs.	As.	
Baiga Chak	91	34,661	0	2,569	0	28	3	7.4
Dindori	57	21.804	15	801	0	15	12	3.7
Mandla	68	34,730	11	2,177	0	32	0	6.3
Mungeli	52	14,909	7	819	0	15	12	5.5
Kawardha	27	9,985	8	357	0	13	9	3.6
Baihar	55	19,484	15	1,051	0	19	1	5.4
For the whole area	350	1,35,576	8	7,774	0	22	3	5.8

lump sums periodically in cash which encourages reckless expenditure among them. On payment days aboriginal labourers can be seen in large numbers at the liquor shop. Developed means of communication have made bazar places and liquor shops more accessible which further encourages drinking among the primitive. Conditions in the Baiga Chak are different but the incidence of drinking is high. Location of the still in the central place of the Chak and its ownership under a Baiga are responsible for heavy drinking. Baiga of the Chak live in a compact area where social intercourse is more frequent resulting in greater consumption of liquor. Baiga villages are quite near one another and relations meet more frequently. Consequently the average expenditure on drink per family is as high as Rs. 28/3/- or 7.4 per cent of the total cost of living. In Dindori and Kawardha tehsils the Baiga population is comparatively scattered and the distance of liquor shops is also longer. Moreover, income from forest work in the form of wages is only 20.4 per cent of the total income. Consequently incidence of drinking is the lowest in these area—Rs. 15/12/- and Rs. 13/9/- being the average expenditure per family on drink or 3.7 and 3.6 per cent of the total cost of living in the two areas respectively. In Mungeli and Baihar the percentage expenditure on drink does not show any material deviation from the percentage expenditure of the whole area, but the average expenditure per family is definitely much lower than the average expenditure for the whole area Rs. 15/12/- and Rs. 10/1/- respectively.

Great difficulty was experienced in ascertaining the approximate frequency of drinking among the Baiga. However, on the basis of general observation the Baiga may be classified into three categories, acoording to the frequency of drinking and the average quantity drunk at a time. In the first category may be placed heavy drunkards who not only drink two to three times in a week. but also gulp even one bottle at a time Habitual heavy drunkards, *gunias* and the old people come under this category. Due to force of habit. professional necessity and the failing health persons of this category indulge in excessive drinking The second category consists of normal drinkers (only men) who take liquor on market days, which comes to twice a month or at the most once a week. On an average they take half or a full bottle not unoften shared by their friends and villagers. This class includes the average youth, healthy old men and casual forest workers. The third category includes persons who are either not in the habit of drinking even occasionally, or who abhor liquor or who are socially not permitted to drink regularly on grounds of age or sex. Some youths do not drink even on bazar days. They take liquor at the time of a dance, some social ceremony or on a guest's visit. Those who have dedicated themselves to the service uf god are called Pandas and do not take liquor at all. In certain cases where a Baiga had received some education of a good standard the drinking habit had decreased. Women as a class do not drink regularly. Except the old who drink to maintain their declining energy, women in general drink either at the time of dancing or marriage ceremony. The investigation revealed that Baiga, women. unlike the Gondin, are not habitual drinkers. The children and even the boys upto fifteen years do not drink. A few sips are given to them by the elders just in fun. The average annual intake of the third category is one or two leaf-cups of the *mahua* liquor. It is very rare to find a woman ever drunk or a casual drinker in the state of drunkenness.

There are, however, certain occasions when even the moderate drinker may indulge in excessive drinking. If a Baiga has worked as a forest labourer he receives cash wages in a lump sum. This is a patent occasion to see a long queue of persons anxious to quench their thirst at the liquor shop. Aboriginals are unable to resist the temptation of the leaf-cup when their purses are full. Market day is another occasion for heavy drinking. If they have saved some money or have earned by selling some forest products or *rai* and pulse, the money goes straightway to the liquor dealer. In fact a visit to the market is often an excuse for enjoying a drink. It is here that Baigas learn their first lesson of drinking. They will even borrow money for liquor on the bazar day. Not long ago the liquor-dealers accepted grain and forest-products in payment of liquor price. This further facilitated drinking for the forest dwellers. There are other occasions, too, on which excessive drinking is not unusual. Marriages, dance and festivals can never be dry in a Baiga village. The force of social customs and the happy mood that prevails on such occasions make the whole atmosphere wild smelling with mahua-liquor. The leaf-cup moves round and round and round. For Baiga believes all joy flows from the leaf-cup.

In the absence of definite data about the drink habit of other tribes, it is difficult to say whether Baigas drink more than other tribesmen. The general notion is that Baiga is a habitual drinker and he does not miss any opportunity of drinking. But enquiries at the outstills or liquor-shops at Mawai, Jalda, Garhi, and Dhurkatta revealed that Gonds and Pankas also did not lag behind. The liquor-dealers opined that as to the drinking habit there was no material difference between a Baiga and other tribesmen. The former's only fault is that he does not consider it a sin nor does he drink stealthily, while other tribesmen try to drop a veil over it. Lingo, the great prophet of the Gonds, laid down the procedure of marriage. 'Make an offering to the domestic gods. Drink, wash the feet, present salutation, join the hands. Keep a full pitcher of liquor on the left. Call for two more pitchers full of liquor and drink according to custom. Apply a *tika* to the front of the pitcher. Let the women sing : O father, you have lost your dearest daughter. O father, for the love of liquor you have lost your dearest daughter.* Dr. Indrajit Singh who made a research study of Gond life observes, 'The Gonds are very fond of liquor. This excessive drinking we might say as well, is the besetting vice of these people. They generally indulge in drinking country liquor distilled from mahua flower.''† In other regions of the State they drink toddy-palm, Sago palm, 'Landa' or rice-beer. The Muria Gonds are equally fond of liquor. To them Liquor-drinking is both a duty and a pleasure. Mahua spirit is a duty because it must be offered to the gods at every festival, at the naming of a child, at a marriage, at a funeral. But the juice of the Sago-palm, and even landa-rice-beer is only for pleasure.''‡ Among Marias of Bastar men, young women and girls, and boys drink; and mothers give liquor to their children except those only just born. Girls soon know when they have had enough, but even then never let the wine-bearer pass them without refilling their leaf-cup, which as soon as he has passed by they take over to the youth of their fancy.*

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* **Mandla District Gazetteer Pp. 65-66.**

† **Dr. Indrajit Singh: 'The Gondawana and the Gond's, p. 21.**

‡ **Elwin: 'The Muria and their Ghotul', p. 49.**

Effects of Drinking

Comparison with other tribes does not show the effects of drinking on Baiga's economic and social life. It is, therefore, essential to analyse the consequences of the drinking habit separately. As discussed earlier 74.6 per cent of the families surveyed were found having deficit budget. Although it has not been possible to establish any direct relationship between *debt and drink*, yet it is obvious that if expenditure on liquor could be reduced, many families could balance their budgets ; and several families would have avoided borrowing altogether. The amount thus saved would have enabled many families to meet their food requirements for which nearly 68 per cent loans were borrowed. Drinking is, therefore, one of the important factors which upsets aboriginals' marginal budget. Irrespective of its ritual or nutritional importance, it is certain that liquor drains out the hard earned income of the poor Baiga. Liquor expenditure stands third in the Baiga's family budget and takes away Rs. 22/3/- per family per year.

The debt aspect of drinking is not less serious although out of 350 Baigas questioned, not even one confessed that he had borrowed for liquor. But the real state of affairs could not be concealed by many. The relationship between the high percentage of income derived from the forest work and heavy drinking in Mandla area shows that forest workers squander away a substantial amount of their income on liquor on wage payment days and then borrow for their food requirements. Similarly those who sell commercial crops like Rai do not save the income. Either it goes into the pockets of Sahukars in payment of debt (in most of the cases incurred for similar reasons) or in the cash box of the liquor dealer. Even in marriage, liquor saps away nearly 25.63 per cent of the total marriage budget. Could expenditure on drink be reduced, if not eliminated altogether, in many cases marriage could be celebrated without borrowing. The direct relationship between debt and drink is thus obvious, although it is not possible to prove it statistically due to Baiga's reluctance to disclose the truth about his drinking habit. Drinking not only increase expenditure, but also reduces income in a number of ways. Thus it exercises an adverse effect on the expenditure and income sides of the family budget.

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* **Grigson : 'Maria Gonds of Bastar' p.171.**

Baigas claim that *mahua* liquor has nutritional value and it has an invigorating effect on them. Their claim has been supported by some health experts and anthropologists, too. But there is other side also of the question. Liquor reduces Baiga's income by reducing his working efficiency and health. The *mahua* spirit, it is asserted,* has no food value, and if at all it has some, it is of little value as an ordinary source of energy because of its harmful effects on the higher nervous centres. Unlike other foods it cannot be stored in the body to be drawn upon as required. The invigorating effect of liquor is of a temporary character. The stimulant action popularly attributed to it is due to a relaxation of tension. With the exception of its action on the respiratory system alcohal never stimulates. If taken frequently, the human body is never free from it and certain deleterious changes in the liver and other organs are brought about. And it is well known that one dose of liquor creates a desire for another—the chain is created unconsciously. Ultimately the gain of temporary stimulation leads to permanent loss of energy and working capacity. Presuming that liquor has nutritional value, has it ever been investigated whether liquor has more nutritional value, than that of foodgrains which could be bought with the amount spent on liquor ? Many Baigas complained that their families had to manage with lesser quantity of food due to shortage of foodgrains. The nutritional gain from liquor dwindles to zero when the effects of even casual half-starvation are taken into consideration. It is both moral and physical cruelty if children and pregnant women remain under-fed, while liquor drinking by men is justified on grounds of its nutritional value.

The *social evils of drink* are equally glaring in Baiga's life. The erotic effect of alcohol leads to many maladjustments in the family. Although a Baiga in his life time marries only once in full fledged and legal manner, he is notoriously famous for his amorous adventures. The cases of desertions, customary break-ups of marriage, illegitimate relationship and infidelity are not few. These irregularities are, no doubt, done within the tribal group, yet their disintegrating effect on family life is thereby not less. The high incidenee of veneral diseases is one of the serious results of excessive drinking. Venereal diseases, it may be remembered, are a potent cause of unhappiness and break up of family life. Drink leads to one more evil of great social significance. The excise system as it exists today, brings abogirinals into frequent *contact with*, and often make him dependent on, *a degraded type of 'alien'*. The liquor-dealer is often a money-lender, a grain merchant and buyer of forest produce—all in one. He is interested mainly in keeping the aboriginal under his grip. The well-drunk aboriginal falls an easy prey to his tricky dealings. Former's visits to the liquor shop increase for which he has to surrender often his crops and forest produce. He may have to mortgage his labour. The victims begin to depend upon the liquor dealer. But the real tragedy lies in the fact that the aboriginal is looked down upon by the liquor contractor. He is despised and treated as a brute and wild creature of the jungle. It produces serious reactions on the mind and conscience of the aboriginal. The whole deal breeds an inferiority complex and causes frustration among the simple primitives. They become 'social untouchables' not only in the eyes of aliens but in their own eyes, too.

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*See the Report of the Health Survey and Development Committee (1946), Vol. II. p.491.

Excise Policy in Tribal Areas

Before suggesting any excise policy for the Baiga regoin it is desirable to review the development of Government excise poilcy in the tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh During the Bhonsla Rule the right to manufacture and sell spiritutous liquor was farmed out to the highest bidder and the Excise Tax known as Kalali or Abkari was collected just like land revenue. The early British Administration did not interfere with the old system and continued it without any material change. Excise Tax was regarded purely as a source of revenue and classed under the head of 'miscellaneous revenue'. Since it was not possible to exercise central control over excise administration, matters of policy as well as administration were left to the individual judgment of District Officers. Consequently the system of Excise Administration varied from one phase to another and from one area to another, according to varying circumstances. A notable change introduced by the British regime was that the monopolies of manufacture and vend were sold to farmers who were not necessarily at the same time contractors for the land revenue collections. This resulted in the birth of an independent class of liquor manufacturers and vendors known as Kalars. They found it to their interest to stimulate the consumption of liquor by selling it at a cheap rate and in as many places as possible. The local administration did not impose any restriction on the number of stills or of shops which the contractors could open according to their sales. It led to the spread of excessive drinking among the aboriginals. In the words of Richard Temple 'The vice of drinking seemed to threaten the gradual deterioration of some of the lower and less civilised classes of the community'. Prompted by a desire to check the evil and wean the aboriginal from drunkenness the Administration introduced the outstill system whereby the number of shops or stills which a contractor might erect or open within the area of his monopoly was restricted. But this arrangement did not work for long. It was subsequently replaced by the *Sadar Distillery system* under which the licensees of retail vend areas were required to distil their liquor in a distillery building situated at Sadar (district headquarters) or to purchase it from others who distilled it there, and to pay a duty on the liquor removed as well as a fee for the right of vend. The Sadar system also did not prove successful and was later on changed over to contract-supply or Madras system. Under this new system the contract of manufacturing and retail selling of liquor were separated. The manufacturer could not sell in retail in his area, but sold liquor to the licensees of retail selling at a prescribed issue price. The retail vend licenses were sold by auction. However, in the tribal areas the outstill system was continued due to undeveloped communications and the demand for a weak and cheap form of liquor.*

The recommendations of the Central Provinces Excise Committee (1904) mark the beginning of the second phase of the excise policy in Madhya Pradesh. The Committee examined the various systems of the Excise, then in force in the Province, and made proposals for their reorganisation and reform. Regarding the outstill system, the Committee considered that it had led to unrestricted drinking. Due to vast and inaccessible forest areas and large facilities for illicit distillation all restrictive measures had proved inoperative. All the evidences recorded by the Committee confirmed that the consumption of liquor in tribal tracts was enormous. The Committee, therefore, recommended certain restrictive measures to reduce the distilling capacity of the stills and to fix a fair duty per gallon on the liquor so produced. The Local Administration in its Resolution No. 8201, dated the 23rd December 1904, summed up the proposals of the Committee, in regard to the country spirit in the following words :

"The aims and scope of a correct policy under this heading (Abkari system), as now understood, may be defined as an effective provision for the exclusive supply of distilled liquor of a nature and strength acceptable to the local consumers, under guarantee or purity, at the lowest possible cost of manufacture and transport of which all that is consumed prepays taxation per gallon at a rate which just falls short in every area of the rate which will induce uncontrollable illicit practices, and is retailed under such circumstances as to ensure a thorough control at a minimum cost, and place it within the reach of all who demand it without prohibitory difficulty on the one hand and without undue facility or temptation to drink on the other."† The Committee further recommended that its restrictive proposals should be applied to the tribal tracts specified in the Report. In the following year in 1905 the Government of India appointed the Indian Excise Committee which examined the Excise Administration in every province. In regard to the general Excise position in the Central Provinces the Committee's advice as in the case of the still-head duty, was in the direction of deprecating too sudden a reform. The Committee warned, 'the country is difficult to traverse and the population comparatively scattered, and the wide distribution of outstills in the past has spread the knowledge of distilling among the people. It is, therefore, necessary to proceed with caution in increasing the price of country spirit and reducing the number of shops lest the result should be, as it has been before, a replacement of licit by illicit consumption.'

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* District Gazetteers of Mandla, Balaghat & Bilaspur

† Report of the Madhya Pradesh Prohibition Enquiry Committee p.4 (1951).

The policy recommended by the Excise Committee of 1904 formed the basis of the subsequent Excise system in the Province until the Excise became in 1920-21 a Provincial subject under the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. The first Reformed Legislative Council, Central Provinces and Berar, in August 1921 recommended to the Government to stop within as short a period as may be practicable the sale of country liquor through the whole province. In response to the Resolution, the Minister of Excise (the late Mr. N.K. Kelker) declared on behalf of the Government as follows :-*

"In view of the strong Indian sentiment in favour of total abstinence and in view of the dangers of abuse, Government is prepared to accept Prohibition as the ultimate goal of its Excise Policy."

The Minister, however, qualified the statement by declaring that prohibition would be the ultimate goal, the means to attain it being progressive restriction by progressive enhancement of the issue price rates of country spirit. This policy was applied also to backward tracts. The area under outstills shrank very fast and the contract supply system took its place. On account of the increase in the issue price rates and closure of large number of shops, the consumption of licit liquor in tribal areas, recorded a sharp fall throughout the Province. But it was noticed that illicit distillation had become rampant and the aboriginals had begun to consume illicit liquor in place of the licit. The aboriginals of the Plateau districts accepted the new policy under legal pressure but at the same time felt that 'it was a conflict between their natural desires and social pressure.' It may be noted here that there was a fundamental difference between the old and new policy. The old policy aimed at temperance, while the new policy aimed at total abstinence. With the adoption of the new policy the contract supply system replaced the outstill system in most of the areas inhabited by aboriginals. By 1924,

The Report of the Prohibition Enquiry Committee, M.P. (1951), p.5.

the primitive outstill system continued only in 4 district, in 1151 square miles of Chanda, 2385 of Raipur, 285 of Drug and 2,506 of Mandla district. The issue price rates were raised from Rs. 1-9-0 to Rs. 6-0-0 per proof gallon, except in Mandla and Bilaspur Districts. Particular care was taken with regard to backward areas where the price of liquor was not allowed to exceed the paying capacity of the aboriginals. The issue price rates were, however, high enough to drive them to illicit sources of supply. The practice of illicit distillation was on the increase and it was becoming increasingly difficult for the Excise staff to detect the offences in the remotest part of the forest areas where the aboriginals had their illicit distills. In 1926 the Government examined the policy that in the best interests of temperence it would be unwise to force the pace unduly and to raise the price of liquor beyond the paying capacity of the habitual consumers. However, the Government did not introduce any major change in its Excise Policy for the next ten years. The signs of failure of the new policy were quite discernible. Illicit distillation was rife throughout the Province and the number of cases detected rose from 439 in 1919-20 to 3745 in 1933. Reports from District Officers confirmed that the retail price of country liquor was too high in the poor aboriginal tracts which diverted them from licit to illicit liquor. The Excise Administration confessed that the nature of the country in which tribals lived made the effective suppression of illicit distillation impossible. From 1935 accordingly issue rates of country liquor were reduced all over the Province. District Officers further recommended for the re-introduction of the outstill system in the predominantly aboriginal areas.

In 1935 the Central Provinces Government appointed a Committee (known as Naidu Committee) to review the working of the Excise Policy and to suggest any measures of improvement in the light of past experience. The Committee, after necessary investigation, came to the conclusion that the persistent pressure of restrictive measures (particularly high prices and the curtailment of facilities of obtaining licit liquor) operated to reduce the consumption of licit liquor on the one hand and to a phenomenal increase in the consumption of illicit liquor, on the other, involving enormous loss of revenue and administrative control. In regard to tribal areas the Committee made it clear that Prohibition must remain a distant ideal and that it would be a grave error to experiment with any pre-conceived ideas of total prohibition in these tracts. For the Plateau districts where most of the Baiga reside, the Committee recommended the reintroduction of the out-still system as a first step in regaining control over illicit distillation. In introducing the outstill system the following restrictions were recommended :—

(a) A limit should be fixed on the maximum quantity of liquor distilled at each outstill.

(b) Middlemen should be eliminated from the liquor trade in the aboriginal areas.

(c) Licenses should, if possible, be issued to headman or other aboriginals who undertake to run outstills in their villages.

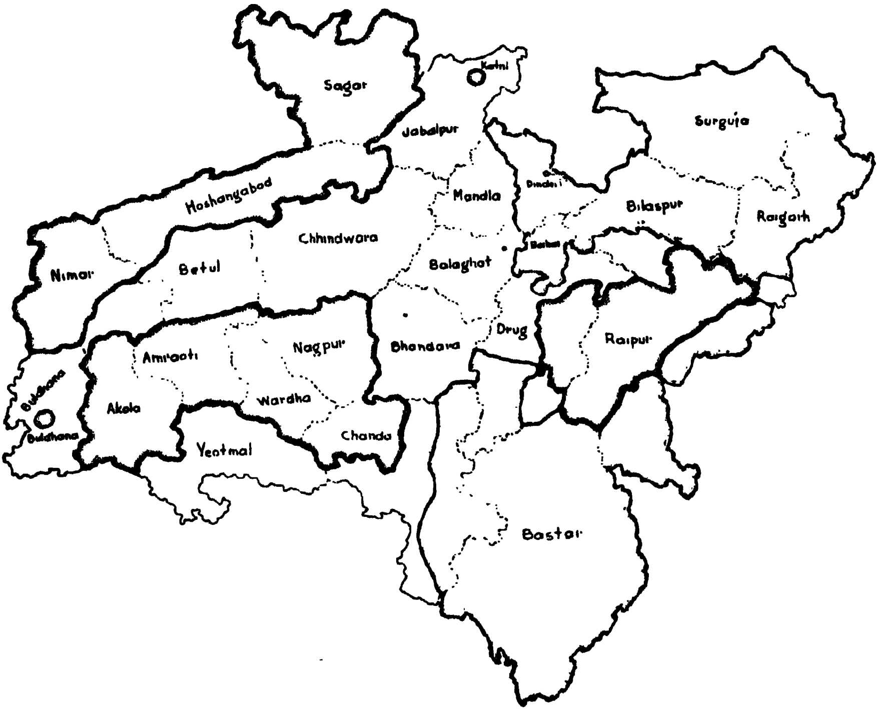
(d) Further control should be exercised by limiting the amount of *mahua* which each licensee is permitted to use.

In pursuance of the recommendations of the Naidu Committee the area under outstill system was expanded quickly. It was increased from 4243 square miles in 1935 to 25,375 square miles in 1937. But it was felt in 1938 that the outstill area was expanded very much and, therefore, it was curtailed considerably all over the Province. The outstill system was abolished in its entirety in the Chhindwara, Betul, Jubbulpore, Bilaspur and Balaghat districts. In 1940 the outstill system served an area of 4,247 square miles in the whole Province which was equal to its pre-expansion days.

Excise Policy of Congress Ministry

1937 was an eventful year in the history of Excise Policy of the Province. With the accession of the Congress Party to power which was wedded to the policy of prohibition, the pendulum took a sudden swing towards immediate prohibition. The Government decided to introduce immediate total prohibition of country liquor and toddy. It, however, recognised the social and ritual importance of liquor in aboriginal life and, therefore, exempted the aboriginal areas. The Districts of Mandla, Betul and Chhindwara were completely excluded from the Prohibition area. Similarly some tracts of other districts were exempted from the Prohibition Act—namely Zamindaris of old Chhatisgarh districts, the Baihar tehsil of Balaghat and the Melghat tehsil of Amraoti District. Government did not make any change in the Excise Policy during the war; except the suspension of Prohibition in the tehsil of Katni-Murwara.

On resumption of office, the Congress Government again took up the question and with effect from the 1st October 1946 added 17,358 square miles to the then already existing 'dry' area and chalked out a programme of making the whole State dry within four years. The first phase was gone through successfully. When the question of adopting the second phase of the prohibition programme came up for decision, the State Government's hand was stayed by financial considerations. In 1948 the 'Wet' area expanded as a result of the integration of fourteen Chhattisgarh States and the Makrai State. The number of liquor shops was reduced in these States and the whole of the Makrai State was made 'dry'. At present the total area under prohibition is



○ Wet Area

◯ Dry Area

○ Area under out still system

Map Showing Wet area, Dry area and Area under

Out still system

39,643 square miles and comprises one-third area of the State with a population of 8,043,000 persons, representing about 48 per cent of the total population of the State (excluding the merged States). The districts made completely dry are : Sagar, Hoshangabad, Wardha, Nagpur, Akola, Nimar, Amraoti except Melghat taluq, Raipur except certain zamindaris, Warora and Brahmapur tehsils of Chanda District, Durg tehsil, Buldana town, Katni-Muwrwara town and Janjgir tehsil of Bilaspur District. It may be noted that the areas in which the Baiga population is concentrated, namely Mandla District, Baihar tehsil of Balaghat District, Mungeli tehsil of the Bilaspur District, Kawardha tehsil of Durg District are still 'wet' areas, where both contract supply and outstill systems are in operation. The following map shows the 'wet' and 'dry' areas, and the areas covered by the outstill system.

As we have seen, Excise policy in tribal areas has oscillated frequently resulting in a sort of confusion among the aboriginals. It is, therefore, necessary to re-shape it in the light of past experience. The Excise Department has primarily to develope a correct attitude among the aboriginals towards Excise policy. Some basic proposals in this respect are discussed in the chapter on Rehabilitation of the Baiga Economy.

CHAPTER XI

BORROWING IN OLD BAIGA ECONOMY

Originally Baiga was a food-gatherer. For most of his food requirements he depended upon nature. All the year round either he collected roots and fruits from the forest or killed wild animals or collected fish from ponds and streams. He had so planned his yearly time-table of food-collection that he could gather edibles for his daily consumption. Since wild fruits or animals were always available at hand, he seldom cared to collect more than what he required everyday or for a particular period. Originally he was not in the habit of picking up fruits for storing. His primitive weapons, storing methods and simple household equipment indicate that he lived a hand to mouth economy. Personal discussion on the topic with older Baigas revealed that the tribe does not believe in accumulating commodities. Bir Singh, a ninety year old *mokkadam* of Dhaba in Baiga Chak remarked, 'How can you find big stores of grain in a Baiga's house ! It is now that we have started cultivating lands, otherwise the old generation lived on Kanda Koosa (food collected from forests). Our store is in the forest.' Thus a Baiga very seldom stored up more than what he consumed every day or every week. He had little surplus to be loaned out to others. Whatever he collected during the bountiful season was earmarked for the rainy day. It was a part of his normal requirement, not a surplus. In the absence of loanable surplus—the basis of loan—it was not possible for a Baiga of old days to advance even commodity loans to his tribesmen frequently. Nor did a Baiga feel the need of borrowing from his neighbours. He had developed a high adaptability to seasonal cycles. The kitchen was adjusted to the changes in season, and consequently to the natural food supply. He lived and still lives in an evergreen forest which provides him fruits, flowers, roots, animals and birds all the year round. It is very rare that harmonious relation between the forest and the Baiga's kitchen is disturbed. Give him 'freedom of the forest' and he would not be found short of food stuffs. He has searching eyes for the forest produce and a remarkable capacity of adapting himself to new situations of food supply. Inspite of the changes wrought out by the forces of civilisation in recent times, he still retains these qualities which are perceptible in more pronounced form in an isolated Baiga village. Food supply being close at hand and Baiga's capacity to adapt himself to seasonal changes in olden days, reduced the necessity of borrowing food to the minimum. Effects of this habit are still traceable in Baiga's life. When the edible fruits and roots are exhausted, leaves, fibres, fuel and bamboos are exchanged with food-grain in the villages of plains or in the weekly market. He is still depending indirectly upon forest products. The availability of forest products affected borrowing among Baigas in two ways. It developed a hand to mouth food economy and rendered storing of surplus food unnecessary. Thus the basis of borrowing, that is, surplus for loans did not exist on a large scale. Secondly, a Baiga could avoid borrowing as he could depend upon Nature during the whole year.

But it should not be deduced from the foregoing discussion that Baiga followed or still follows a bankrupt economy. Undoubtedly he did not store up surplus for advancing loans in a regular manner; but at the same time by depending on Nature for a long time he has learnt the wisdom of saving something for the rainy day. He knows it fully well that there is a 'global failure' in Nature, too; or seasonal cycles cause temporary shortages against which he must guard himself in advance. The Baiga technique of dehydrating forest produce. meat and fish is well known. One can hardly miss small baskets hanging by the roof of the interior room of the Baiga hut. The mistress of the home is proud of them for they are the proof of her dexterity and thrift, and enable her family to tide over the period of scarcity and 'refusal by the forest'. Such preserved articles often obviate the necessity of borrowing food from others. Baiga had another method of safeguarding himself against the possibility of borrowing. Old Baigas told us that in old days they were in the habit of changing village sites. Whenever their neighbouring forests were struck by any evil spirit (meaning thereby when forests caught fire or their growth was stunted), or when some families could not find a suitable Bewar site, they would shift to another village where some of its near relatives resided. This movement was nothing but a method of safeguarding against possible scarcity of food in the near future. Before it became necessary for a Baiga family to fall upon others support—loan—it shifted to a more favourable forest area where it could replenish the stock of food. This tradition had a long-term effect upon borrowing. It minimised the necessity of borrowing and developed the spirit of self-help among the Baiga. Thus the habit of preserving food and the shifting of village site further restricted the borrowing system in the tribe.

However, sometimes situations arose which necessitated borrowing among Baigas even in olden days. If on the one hand, Nature supplied a variety of food, on the other she exposed the Baiga tribe to her vagaries and uncertainties. Fires on a large scale, drought, attack of epidemic on man, cattle or plants, or floods paralysed Baiga's plans. He would seek others help and borrow some foodstuff, either from some less unfortunate neighbour or a Baiga living in a distant village. Natural calamity broke his fortress of self-sufficiency and compelled him to borrow others grain. A mention may be made of a similar situation though created by a legal fiat when Baigas had to borrow extensively. In 1867 Government stopped cutting of Bewar except in the Baiga Chak. However, the States of Kawardha and Rewa permitted Bewar to the aboriginals in their territories. Two alternatives were left to the Baiga of British Provinces : either they could adopt plough cultivation or migrate to the areas where Bewar was still permitted. In both the cases they had to borrow. Those who took to the plough had to take seeds on loan and since they were not well-versed in the technique of cultivation their crops for a number of years were poor, necessitating further borrowing of foodstuff. It was long before the section which migrated to the neighbouring States settled in new forests and therefore subsisted on borrowed foodstuffs during the unsettled period. During this period of transition Baigas resorted to borrowing both within and outside the tribe. Though the reasons were different, the conditions were similar to large scale failure of nature.

Besides natural calamity or the administrative change noted above, Baigas sometimes also borrowed money as well as food stuff for the celebration of social ceremonies. Marriage is a big event in a Baiga's life. It involves additional expenditure which only the foresighted or well to do Baiga families can manage without outside help. Even in olden times the Baiga borrowed for meeting marriage expenditure. Similarly the death ceremony is of great significance. There is a tribal feast involving an expenditure of nearly twenty to thirty rupees. The Laru Kaj is also an expensive ceremony over which a Baiga has to spend lavishly. Since his is a hand-to-mouth economy, such extra-expenditure has to be met through borrowing. But the amount borrowed for such purposes is determined by tribal customs and sanctions.

The social character of such borrowing is, however, significant. *Prima facie* the transaction appears to bear similarity to the modern system of loans, for there is a creditor and debtor ; sometimes interest is charged on the loan and the debtor is under obligation to repay the loan. Yet, a closer examination of the system will reveal the working of social and ethical forces behind it. The Baiga of olden days (and also of the present day to some extent) advanced loans to his tribesmen, not as an invester or capitalist, but in the spirit of mutual aid and tribal brotherhood. The tribesmen in distress naturally evokod sympathies of other members who voluntarily extended their helping hand. The older generation seldom attached conditions to such loans, nor charged high interest on them. Relics of this system are still found in some Baiga villages of the interior where Baiga families advance commodity loans to one another and do not regard such transactions as debt or loan. The whole system was regulated by tribal laws and customs. Instead of profit and competition, ethical and social factors shaped and propelled their system of borrowing. Since 'aliens' had not penetrated the interior parts of the forests, borrowing was confined within the tribe or, at the most, extended to other tribals. Consequently the scope, character, credit agency and terms of repayment were wholly governed by socio-economic factors of the tribal life. Since tribal kinship formed the basis of the system, the lender had full regard for the borrower's economic condition and his repaying capacity. Opinions of village elders, not the creditor's intention or temperament, decided the degree of relaxation of the terms and conditions of the loan. However, fear of tribal condemnation acted as a check on evasion or stubbornness on the part of borrower.

Like other rural people Baigas did not use money in their exchange transactions in the old days. Since they borrowed food-stuff mostly for consumption, the question of borrowing money did not arise. Among themselves they advanced commodity loans, while borrowing from other tribals or non-tribals was also repayable in kind. Therefore commodity transactions were common in the Baiga economy. This had a tremendous effect upon Baiga's economic position. Firstly, the burden of his debt did not fluctuate with price fluctuations as his loans were not calculated in terms of money. If he borrowed say twenty seers of grain he had to repay the same quantity in kind. Secondly, the rate of interest, if at all charged, was considerably stable. It was not affected, by the changes in the market since the interest was also payable in kind. Thus, the whole system revolved around commodity and not money. It worked to the great advantage of Baiga. Like the present day Baiga, he was not required to sell his produce in the market nor to the pedlers to repay his debt. He repaid his debt in his own produce, and thus saved himself from all those losses and inconveniences involved in a sale to 'an alien' trader or money lender. Repayment in kind was easily comprehended by him and his family. It did not cause any extra-burden upon him nor made him dependent on outsiders. Like the Baiga of today, he was not exposed to the malpractices and fraudulent manipulations of the moneylender.

A question vitally connected with the character of Baiga's borrowings arises: Whether a Baiga borrowed commodities mainly for production or consumption in olden times ? The answer largely depends upon the view that we take of his production or consumption. If we look at Baiga's consumption from the point of view of modern economy, it will certainly appear to be unproductive ; and therefore any loan borrowed for it would also be considered of an unproductive character. The reason is obvious. In a large scale enterprise the four factors of production are owned and supplied by different agencies ; and therefore only those items of expenditure will be incorporated in the entrepreneur's budget and considered productive which directly relate to the remuneration of any of the four factors of production. The situation is slightly complex in the case of the Baiga entrepreneur. He combines in himself the ownership of all the four factors of production. He is an entrepreneur, a landowner, a capitalist, a manager and a worker, too. The expenditure which he incurs on his maintenance, therefore, combines in it the elements of profit, rent, interest, salary and wages. Whatever amount of commodity he borrows will be utilised in satisfying the claims of the factors production supplied by him. Therefore, we cannot regard his borrowing for consumption as unproductive or uneconomic. In fact he borrows for continuing his productive activities, to ensure a regular supply of his personal labour and to enlist the co-operation of his tribesmen through tribal feasts and festivals. For example, on Dassehra, Baiga villages exchange visits and enjoy feasts which are later on reciprocated through villagers' cooperation in hunting and fishing. Whenever a Baiga borrows for himself or for the maintenance of his family, or where the borrowing adds to his efficiency or ensures the cooperation of his tribesmen, his borrowing should be regarded productive. But when he takes a loan for social purposes which neither increases his productivity nor brings tribesmen into his enterprise, his borrowing may be regarded unproductive. A reference may be made to borrowing for drink. Before the Government introduced its present excise policy, Baiga was free to distil *mahua* liquor without any restriction. Since *mahua* flowers were available at hand in most of the areas, he did not purchase *mahua* flowers from others. Freedom to distil and the availability of *mahua* flowers minimised the need of borrowing. In olden days, therefore, drink did not lead to borrowing among the Baiga. It is on the opening of the licensed liquor shop that Baiga had to find cash for buying liquor.

Changes in the charcter of Borrowing

The Baiga economy has undergone fundamental changes in the last eighty years. The centre of Baiga's activity has shifted from the forest to the farm; from a primitive food-gatherer, he has become an ordinary cultivator. Stoppage of Bewar has changed the very nature of his economic activity. He has fallen in line with the plough-cultivator. Unlike his forefathers the pattern of his wants has changed considerably. Now he does not depend upon forest produce exclusively. He has begun to eke out his livelihood from plough cultivation. Like an ordinary peasant he has to arrange for seeds, manures, animal power and implements. Since he is less resourceful than the ordinary cultivator, often he has to borrow for his agricultural operations. As he has to seek the cooperation of artisans in his farming activities, he must give them adequate remuneration and at a proper time. At times Baiga has to engage farm labour to whom he must pay wages either in kind or in money. In some areas he does not carry on staple farming only, but also raises commercial crops. Where the means of transport have penetrated into the interior, commercial crops are fast displacing the food crops. A Baiga therefore needs money for purchasing food grains till the harvest of commercial crops is sold in the market or to the petty trader. The over-all change in his productive activities has increased the need of borrowing commodity or money from the money-lender.

As a food-gatherer he was not required to pay any rent for the cultivation of land. Land revenue did not form a part of his expenditure budget. But today as a cultivator he has to pay land revenue in terms of money and at a fixed time of the year. Baiga is today faced with an entirely new situation. Either he must sell his produce immediately after the harvest when the market is flooded and the price of his commodity is low which entails heavy loss on his transaction, and in turn makes him more vulnerable to debt for the next season; or he must borrow money from others. Usually he approaches the village moneylender, the common source of credit in the village.

In a Baiga village of the old type, labour was seldom hired on wages. The family was practically self-sufficient in labour supply. Hence there was no wage system among the food-gatherers. As such, wages were not a source of income of the Baiga. Their expenditure budget was planned on the basis of forest products, the supply of which was spread over the whole year. Unlike a wage-earner there was no periodical abundance or shortage in Baiga's income. He was not in the habit of spending lavishly at the time of wage payment and living on borrowed money till the next payment. But with the coming of employment opportunities through the Forest Department, Forest contractors and P.W.D., the situation has changed considerably. In some parts of the Baiga region particularly in the Baihar Tehsil and Forest villages—a separate class of seasonal labourers has emerged which largely depends upon wages earned by working, either in the forest or road-construction work. The Government departments and the forest contractors pay wages either weekly or monthly or in some cases payment is made after every three months. The new system of periodical money wages has created many difficulties for a Baiga. Like an industrial worker he becomes a spendthrift on the wage payment days and a helpless dependent on the moneylender for the rest of the period. Thus, the wage system has converted a very large section of the Baiga into habitual borrowers.

Contact with the external market through traders and pedlars and the weekly bazar has also influenced the borrowing habit of the Baiga. Petty traders and vendors of small towns pay regular visits to Baiga villages and sell salt. oil, cloth, utensils and other articles of consumption on credit or partial credit, on the condition that when harvest comes they will have priority over it. Being busy in agricultural operations, hunting or in the collection of the forest product, Baiga falls easy prey to these vendors who are interested in encouraging credit purchases among the simple folk. Once the process starts it never ends. Baiga is indirectly under the obligation of the vendor to make purchases only from him, while the vendor uses all methods of enticing the ignorant aboriginal. It develops into a habit with a Baiga and makes him a habitual borrower. Cultivation of commercial crops and adoption of new articles of consumption have further encouraged borrowing among the Baiga. In certain areas like Baihar or villages near town markets of Bicchia, Mawai and Dindori cultivation of oilseeds has become very popular. So much so that a section of the Baiga has started purchasing food stuffs from the market or the money lender. Since Baigas of these areas cultivate commercial crops regularly. they need money to buy food crops till their crops are disposed off. The increasing use of new articles of consumption has given further filip to borrowing. The food-gatherer of olden days has now begun to use new types of clothes, beads, imitation pearls, bangles, lanterns, tin boxes, soap and even electric-torches and modern kerosene lamps. Often he purchases these articles in weekly markets with cash. When he is short of money or when he is not in a position to sell off his produce for cash, he borrows from his neighbour or purchases on credit from the shopkeeper, who knows him as his regular customer.

Another important factor which has encouraged borrowing habit in the tribe is the emergence of an independent class of 'alien' moneylenders and the opening of licensed liquor shops in the Baiga areas. The professional moneylenders exploited the transitory period of the Baiga economy to their fullest advantage. Since they subsisted on income from moneylending, they tried to spread the tentacles of their business to the farthest corner of the Baiga region. The Baiga who were isolated in their own villages and to whom credit was not easily available, fell victim to the moneylender's bait, thrown in the shape of easy loans for any purpose. The mahajan after advancing a loan would show indifference towards its recovery till the amount mounted up, and brought the

Baiga into his grip completely. A vicious circle would start—the debtor borrowed because he was poor—and he was poorer because he was a debtor. The licensed liquor shops also made their contribution to this situation. Liquor has its roots in the very tradition of Baiga life, and therefore, it was an indispensable article of consumption. As long as a Baiga could distil his own *mahua* individually or collectively, he was not required to go to the liquor shop with ready cash ; but in the changed conditions now he has to find money for buying liquor. Without going into the ethical side of drinking it must be noted that its consumption is unavoidable in Baiga's life. Either he should distil or buy, but drink he must. In the absence of the first alternative, he had to resort to the second for which he sometimes borrowed. The shop-keeper never cared whether a Baiga purchased liquor with the borrowed money or with his own earning. His only concern was to supply liquor as long as the latter paid for it, and often to a known person he would supply on credit. Such credit sales were more common where the buyer was a resident of a neighbouring village of the distillery or worked on wages either on the road or in the Forest Department. Liquor on credit to the favoured ones, encouraged others to borrow from their co-drinkers—a practice so commonly noticed among the Baiga sitting near the sale counter of the liquor shops. Forest contractors played their part too. Sometimes they paid money wages in advance for which the receiver mortgaged his future labour. This was often followed by borrowings from these contractors. Such transactions appear to be fair on their face but in actual practice they push the Baiga into the bonds of debt.

Results of the change

To state the changes briefly, from a food-gatherer Baiga has become an ordinary cultivator ; instead of kind revenue, he now pays cash revenue ; money economy has taken the place of kind economy. External market has made inroads into his self-sufficiency and the professional moneylender and the liquor shop-keeper are the prime movers of his economic wheel. The new situation has produced disastrous effects on the tribal borrowing system and Baiga's attitude thereto. With the loosening of tribal ties the mutual-aid basis of the old loan system has disappeared from the primitive life. The emergence of an independent class of professional moneylenders has converted lending into an economic activity and a profitable channel of investment. Slowly money lending business has passed into the hands of non-tribals who have no sympathy towards the tribals. Tribal laws and customs which formerly regulated the borrowing transactions and controlled the lender's activities, have failed to check the professional 'alien' moneylender from exploiting the simple Baiga. Since Baiga was passing through an economic crisis caused by the change-over from forest to farm economy, he fell victim to the rapacious activities of the Sahukar. The protective legislations were too late, and when enforced they were found quite inadequate to meet the situation. Baiga found himself thrown into an economic whirl. Under the old economy, no doubt, he borrowed commodity and/or money from his tribesmen. But there was a significant difference. The rate of interest was controlled by the tribal customs, the terms of repayment were suited to tribal occupations, and moreover they were relaxable in times of difficulty. A Baiga, therefore, seldom considered his borrowing as debt. But things have changed under the moneylender. Once a Baiga falls into the moneylender's grip, he finds it an uphill task to come out of it. Loan from the Sahukar means perpetual bondage. Baiga strives, strives and strives to repay the loan but does not succeed. The tragedy is that a Baiga appears to be free like a bird and is seen roaming freely in the forest. But the opposite is true. His body is chained down. While working he is well aware that he is earning to pay more and more to the moneylender. A Baiga works on his farm or Bewar not as a proud Bhumia (Lord of the soil) but under the heavy burden of debt. His heart rebels—he experiences a tension in his life, but finds himself helpless. Ultimately he developes an attitude of fatalism and recklessness which finds expression in excessive drink leading to more debt. The whole atmosphere is vitiated. His own tribesmen and other aboriginals who used to help one another in times of difficulty, are now playing a different role. The more resourceful among them now give loans to the afflicted on exorbitant rates of interest. The biological process of 'the bigger fish swallowing the smaller one has started among the tribals as well. During the investigation one Panda Baiga of Ladra village in Pandaria Zamindari was found to have lent grain and money to nearly forty Baiga families of his area and charged 37½% to 50% rate of interest on his loans. The poignancy of the situation is further intensified when the changed character of Baiga's borrowing is taken into consideration. Loans for consumption purposes are on the increase without corresponding improvement in his productive capacity. His limitations in respect of capital, land and technical skill prevent him from making fullest use of his labour. Therefore, whatever he now borrows is used up in feeding the increasing number of idle persons in his family. Formerly he could utilise the total man-power of his family either in the collection of forest produce or on Bewar and therefore the borrowed food stuff was used in maintaining the productive labour. But now he has to feed the under-employed family with borrowed foodgrains. Therefore, a considerable percentage of his food borrowings have now become unproductive. How a mounting percentage of unproductive loans hits the borrower is well known. Baiga borrowed foodgrains for consumption purposes before also and even now he borrows mainly for consumption. But in olden times it was productive consumption, while it has now become unproductive due to under or unemployed hands in the family. The new situation has thus caused considerable change in the character of borrowings of the Baiga.

CHAPTER XII

INDEBTEDNESS OF THE BAIGA

The debt position among the aboriginals, particularly among hill or forest tribes like the Baiga, has not received much attention either at the hands of administration or social and research workers.* Studies in agricultural indebtedness have concentrated, generally speaking, on the problem of debt in the more open and better developed areas. For example, the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee which made the first attempt at surveying rural debt restricted their investigations to the villages of the plains. They did not extend their enquiries to the tribal villages situated in the interior parts of forest lands or on the hill-tops. The Committee did not think it necessary to make an intensive survey of any of the 'more jungly villages. where the people depend for their maintenance on precarious Kodon and Kutki crops, and forest produce such as *mahua*, because the aboriginals have practically no credit and as a rule are not indebted, being primarily forest dwellers rather than cultivators'. Similarly in Settlement Reports of predominantly aboriginal districts very little attention has been paid to the incidence of debt and its consequent adverse effects upon the tribal population.† The administration also held the same ideas about tribal debt. For instance, at the time of Grigson's enquiry the Deputy Commissioner of Betul reported that the effects of aboriginal debt were exaggerated and that it was far less than that of other people. The Yeotmal Report also endorsed that the problem of aboriginal debt was 'not very serious'. The question has not received priority even in the uplift schemes of the State Government. The Five Year Uplift scheme prepared under the veteran guidance of the late Shri Thakkar Bapa for the welfare of Backward Areas, does not include any measure of direct or indirect relief to the indebted. Nor did the Conference on Tribal Welfare recently convened at Delhi by the President, lay any special emphasis on tribal debt in its deliberations. Unfortunately the paoblem has not received as much consideration as it should have, even at the hands of anthropologists and social workers in the State. Hardly any scientific survey has been made by any anthropologist or research worker of the debt burden in the aboriginal communities. Social workers individually or

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See Grigson : 'The Aboriginal Problem in Balaghat District'. p.50 and Grigson: 'The Aboriginal Problem in C.P. and Berar,' p. 166.

Last Settlement Report of Mandla District quoted by Hyde in his Memo. to Grigson.

through non-official organisations have practically done nothing in this direction. The results are obvious. Very little data are available which could throw some light on the problem of tribal debt. Most of the debt legislation was framed for the rural areas of the plains. And wherever it was applied in tribal tracts it met with serious failure.

Naturally, one should enquire into the causes of this state of affairs. Firstly, there is a tendency to assume that debt is negligible amongst the aboriginals. This assumption has led many officials and non-officials to by-pass the problem and base all their further enquiries on it. They seldom cared to examine the truth of their assumption. It may be true in some areas that the food-gatherer or a primitive cultivator was less indebted than the cultivator of plains. But it is equally correct that the per capita income is much lower in aboriginal tracts than in the villages of the plains. Obviously the burden of debt is higher on the aboriginals than on the cultivators who are better placed than the former. And as far as the ameliorative measures go, we are more concerned with the burden on the average family than with the absolute amount of the debt. Another factor responsible for the low figures of tribal debt is that tribal people are so ignorant and illiterate that they are unable to tell the amount of their debt. They do not keep regular accounts nor are they told by their creditor of their outstanding balance at the end of every year. Moreover, it is extremely difficult to get any information regarding debt through direct questions. It is all the more difficult for an outsider to persuade the Baiga to disclose a secret matter like debt for they are shadowed by mental slavery to the Sahukar. To what extent these difficulties were overcome by those who presumed aboriginal debt to be low is not known. The argument adduced by the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee of 1929-30 that 'because aboriginals have practically no credit, and therefore 'as a rule they are not indebted', has another aspect also. The aboriginals are living in steep poverty and therefore there is greater possibility of their falling easily into the hands of the moneylender and a lesser possibility of getting out of debt due to their low income. Consequently the dangers of debt are as much present in tribal villages as in the cultivators' villages. Therefore, less attention to the poblem of aboriginal debt in the past had no justification, and in future special efforts should be made to undertake regional or tribal surveys for collecting data and finding a solution of the problem. The gravity of the problem has been well recognised in the Constitution of India. The Governor is empowered to regulate the business of persons who lend money to members of the Scheduled Tribes in the Scheduled areas.*

Provisions as to the Administration and Control of Scheduled Areas and Tribes, Refer 'The Constitution of India,' p 218.

Origin and Growth of Indebtedness

During the last eight decades Baiga economy had to pass through drastic changes at a very rapid rate. After 1867 when Bewar was stopped in most of the Provinces, the Baiga had to take to plough cultivation except in the Baiga Chak. The sudden change in the technique of cultivation gave jerks and jolts to Baiga's economic system. The tribe took a long time to adjust itself to the new conditions. Being not well-versed in plough cultivation, Baiga could not raise sufficient crops in his cultivated fields. His income was on the decline. Frequent change of village site in search of new Bewar plots, entailed heavy loss of crops and often necessitated borrowing. On the other hand the number of mouths he had to feed, was annually increasing; while the area of his holding was reduced, due to the change from Bewar to plough cultivation. Sudden change in the system of cultivation, reduction in the scale of his agricultural operations, decline in the agricultural yield and the consequent fall in his income and extra-ordinary expenditure incurred on migrations, converted the Baiga economy into a *deficit economy*—the factor at the root of Baiga's debt.

It is interesting to study as to how the deficit economy leads to debt and taken advantage of by the moneylender. In old days when a Baiga enjoyed the 'freedom of forest' he could manage the celebration of his social ceremonies within his budget. But after the break down of his Bewar economy, he found it difficult to meet *expenditure on social ceremonies*, the scale of which was increasing as a result of culture—contact with more 'civilised' tribes. Rising social expenditure, particularly in good times pushed him into debt. The vicious circle of aboriginal indebtedness begins with the necessity of borrowing to finance a festival or a marriage in the family. Whatever little money or grain he borrows starts growing in an embryonic manner. Usually he has to pay a rate of interest as high as 50 per cent. Every year he goes on paying the amount of interest and by the compound rate of interest, the debt goes on mounting. If the origin of aboriginal indebtedness lies in social necessity, its volume is certainly due to the *creditor's way of dealing*. Like a multipurpose society, the moneylender of tribal areas performs many functions. Generally he lives either in a market village or in a village of bigger size situated in the central position of the region. His profession is 'half shop-keeper, half lender and wholly userer.' As a shop-keeper of clothes, salt, bangles and jewellery, he encourages the aboriginal to buy on credit. Therefore, the taking of loans (both cash and grain) is facilitated and the vicious circle of debt-repayment-debt is started. As a lender he advances loan for an investment of unfailing nature yielding highest dividends. Peak is reached in his role as an userer. Here his sole concern is to collect as much money as possible by way of interest in the shape of produce from the thrashing floor at the harvest time. The travelling pedlars have also contributed to the growth of indebtedness amongst aboriginals. They offer cloth, salt, jewellery etc. to the aboriginal on credit and the aboriginal soon finds that the interest on their petty transactions swells after a few years to incredible demands. The pedlars haunt the villages every now and then, particularly at harvest and at least succeed in recovering the amount of interest accumulated at the end of the year. The forest and other *contractors* are also responsible partially for converting the aboriginal into habitual borrowers. One of the officials reported to Grigson during the course of latter's tour of tribal areas that* 'actually more harm is done to the aboriginal by advance contracts on unconscionably hard terms than by pure money-lending'. These contractors advance money to aboriginal villagers on the condition that if they do not supply the agreed quantity of a specific forest produce within a particular period. they will be entitled to demand twice that quantity. Natural calamities prevent the aboriginals from delivering the stipulated quantity of forest products and expose them to the rapacity of contractors. Such contracts are in vogue not only in the collection of forest products but also for ghi, oilseeds, dal and bullock cart transport in the ryotwari areas. Since they are prompted by a desire to exploit the aboriginal, they increase the volume of indebtedness in the tribal areas. Thus. Baiga is exposed to the attacks of both man and nature. Some legislative measures have been enacted to protect him against the money-lenders' activities. But Baiga is absolutely *ignorant* about them. He is not aware even of their existence, to say nothing of availing the benefit of such legislation. His sense of honour over repayment is so high that the idea of getting his debt written off under law does not appeal to him. Apart from this, there are certain factors, discussed in the subsequent pages, which obstruct his access to the law courts. In the existing circumstances neither law nor equity protects him against plundering by the Sahukar who flourishes under the present law and administration. Nor do civilised man's scientific methods and equipment save him from the *vagaries of nature*. If rains fail, he must look to the sky and the mysterious Power residing there, rather than at dams, canals or wells. His crops are at the mercy of disease, pests and wild animals. His is a residuary share in nature's gift. Living in the lap of the densest forest, he is under the constant danger of disease and epidemic. Very little has been done by the administration or the social worker to protect the Baiga, either against the exploiting section of the civilised world or against

Grigson's Report, p. 205.

natural calamities. Vulnerable to attacks from all sides he falls into debt. He finds himself in a spider-web where the coils of interest reel upon capital.

Comparison with Rural Indebtedness

The problem of rural indebtedness is not so serious in Madhya Pradesh compared with other States. The findings of the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee (1929-30) disclosed that Central Provinces had the lowest total rural indebtedness among all the Provinces excepting Assam and the Central Areas.* The total rural indebtedness of Central Provinces was estimated at Rs. 36 crores, while that of Bengal Rs. 100 crores, U.P. Rs. 124 crores, Punjab Rs. 135 crores, Madras Rs. 150 crores, Bombay Rs. 81 crores, Bihar-Orissa Rs. 155 crores.†

The percentage of persons free from debt was also highest in the Central Provinces, varying from 13 to 70 in the case of cultivators—while in Assam it varied from 9 to 38 per cent. in Bihar-Orissa from 17 to 19 per cent. and in United Provinces from 33 per cent. to 61 per cent. But the position does not remain so happy when we consider the average debt per family in the State. The Provincial Committee which calculated the average debt per family reported as follows—Bombay Rs. 329, Bengal Rs. 160, C.P. and Berar Rs. 227 and Assam Rs. 242. The State slides down further when the debt situation is viewed in the background of percentage of debt to the annual value of agricultural produce.

The following figures throw light on the incidence of debt in different provinces.‡

TABLE SHOWING RELATION BETWEEN DEBT AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE

Province	Percentage of debt to the annual value of agricultural produce.
Assam	41
Bengal	41
Bihar & Orissa	129

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* Refer Report of the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, (Vol. I) (C.P. and Berar), p. 57.

† Report of the Central Banking Enquiry Committee 1929-30 p. 55 (Main Report).

‡ Manilal B. Nanavati and J. J. Anjaria : 'The Indian Rural Problem'(Third Edition), p. 50.

Province	Percentage of debt to the annual value of agricultural produce
Bombay	53
Central Provinces	46
Madras	90
Punjab	141

Apparently the data quoted above are related to a period as far back as 1929-30 when the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee surveyed the debt position in the State. Since then some Provinces have re-surveyed position but no comparative data are available for the country as a whole. In Madhya Pradesh, too, no comprehensive attempt has been made so far to review the conditions afresh in the light of changes in the price-structure brought about by the Second World War. However, we analyse the position of rural debt in the light of the findings of the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee. The following statement exhibits the position for the Province as a whole :—*

CULTIVATOR'S DEBT IN CENTRAL PROVINCES & BERAR (1929-30)

Zones	Total Debt	All round incidence			Percentage of cultivators free from debt
		Per family of cultivator	Per acre of land held	Per Re. of rent paid	
	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	
Cotton zone	19,61,91,171	555	16	15	42
Rice zone	3,57,79,572	59	6	6	58
Wheat zone	5,15,54,344	296	12	8	31
Plateau zone	1,52,41,679	82	4	6	54
Total for the whole province	29,87,66,766	227	9	9	46

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* Report of the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee (C. P. & Berar) Vol. I, p. 122.

Position of different zones

On examining the details of the above table it is found that indebtedness of the cultivators in the Rice Zone is relatively lower, while in the Wheat zone the average debt per tenant family is 5½ times that of the Rice zone, although the average holdings are far larger. The high average indebtedness in the Wheat zone is attributed to great variations in out-turn. In the Cotton zone the average debt per cultivator is 10 times that of the Rice Zone. Steep fluctuations in the price of cotton in the thirties are responsible for the high incidence of debt in the Cotton Zone. The Plateau zone is most favourably situated amongst all the zones as far as debt is concerned. The reasons are obvious. The region is predominantly populated with aboriginals whose credit-worthiness is practically lowest among all the sections of the rural population. Since the technique of cultivation is of a very primitive type in the region, the total credit needs are also lower. The amount of seasonal loans annually borrowed is much less in this zone than in the more developed tracts.* "The less advanced tracts are too remote and present too little material security to attract speculative moneylenders."†

The over-all position in 1929-30 stood as follows :—

The total rural debt of Central Provinces then represented about 49 per cent. of the value of the normal gross crop out-turn, and about 66 per cent of the total annual costs of maintenance, cultivation and assessment. It represented 1½ times the balance of agricultural income over their necessary items of expenditure and about 5/6 ths of the balance. If the amount of Rs. 50/- as subsidiary income per cultivating family were added, the total cultivator's debt represented Rs. 227 per cultivating family, and the interest charges thereon to an average of Rs. 45/8/- per cultivating family per annum. The average villager borrows mainly for the repayment of old debt and for financing his current agricultural operations. The percentages of loans for these two purposes of borrowing come to 26 and 23 respectively. Marriage and other social ceremonies are the second important items for which the rural folk take loans from moneylenders. The percentage for such loan, according to the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee is 14 of the total borrowing. Other reasons for taking loans are maintenance expenses, payment of revenue arrears, agricultural improvement, and purchase of land and litigation and business. Among the *causes* of indebtedness the principal ones are:—

(a) The land revenue policy of Government with recurring enhancement of rent and land revenue at re-settlement.

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* **Report of the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee (C. P. & Berar) Vol. I, p. 114.**

† **Ibid Vol. II, p. 652.**

(b) The improvidence and extravagance of the cultivators.

(c) Uneconomic holdings.

(d) Rapacity and dishonesty of moneylenders.

(e) The unproductivity of the soil and relatively small profits from agriculture.

There is no unanimity as to the root causes of rural indebtedness in the State. Some hold that peasant's extravagance is mainly responsible for the debt, while others want to pillory the moneylander; and there is the third section which considers the deteriorating economic status of the cultivator wholly responsible for the present state of affairs. For the State as a whole it is worthwhile to quote the opinion of the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee and postpone the question of tribal population for fuller discussion. "We are satisfied that the real causes of indebtedness, that is to say, of financial embarrassment owing to the accumulation of debt beyond immediate paying capacity are :—

(i) The extreme variations of crop out-turns and prices

(ii) high rates of interest, and

(iii) the absence of proper facilities for a system of capital investment in good years."*

It is worthwhile to note certain features of rural indebtedness of the State before we discuss the problem of Baiga's debt in its details. A review of the over-all position of the State discloses a wide regional disparity in the incidence of debt in the State. For example, the average debt per family in the Cotton Zone was Rs. 555 and for the Plateau Zone it was estimated at Rs. 82. This suggests that cultivation of money crops, development of means of transport and money economy do not always bring prosperity to an area unless other measures of marketing, credit and technical improvement are taken. Another inference is: inaccessibility of the tribal areas, poor credit-worthiness of the aboriginals, and lack of regular contact with the moneylenders have in a way kept the incidence of debt at a lower level in these tracts. As regards security for loans it may be kept in view that uptil now 85 per cent of the land held by cultivators in the State was held in occupancy or ryotwari right, untransferable by sale or mortgage and not attachable in satisfaction of debtors. "The occupancy tenants and ryots have, therefore, no credit beyond the value of their standing crops, their cattle, their movable property and their own personal honesty." This has affected the ratio of secured loans to unsecured loans which stood at 27.5 to 72.5 in 1929-30, The percentage of secured loans was as high as 43.3 in Berar, where

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* Report of the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee (C. P. & Berar), Vol. I, p. 186.

95 per cent of land held was transferable by sale or mortgage. But in the Province as a whole the percentage of unsecured loans was very high. With greater risks, the interest rates are higher, normally averaging round 24 per cent per annum, with a penal stipulation of a higher rate of interest usually at 37½ per cent in default of payment. In aboriginal areas where the security-offering capacity of borrowers is the poorest, the rate of interest goes as high as 100 per cent in some cases, while 50 per cent is the rule. There is a small percentage of persons heavily indebted. At the other extreme there is a higher percentage of persons who are not indebted at all. Between the two extremes, stand the cultivators who are indebted in varying degrees. This middle class of debtors owes debt mainly due to seasonal borrowings for financing agricultural operations. Such debtors constitute the real problem of rural debt, for "when bad years come in succession, the annual seasonal loans and the intermediate loans cannot be repaid, and rapidly mount at a high rate of interest, while the cultivator is compelled to borrow in addition further sums of money to enable him to maintain himself and to carry on his agricultural operations until a good crop comes."* And by the time he will get a good crop, the margin between good crop and a bad crop is already eaten up by the galloping rate of interest. Therefore, the real problem in the State is two-fold—first, to provide seasonal intermediate loans to the average cultivator, and second, to provide immediate relief to the indebted cultivator on the failure of crops.

Difficulties in collecting data about Baiga's Debt

Baiga's attitude towards debt, particularly borrowings within the tribe, is the greatest obstacle in collecting data about his debt. What we regard as debt in the ordinary course is not considered as such by the Baiga. For example, food grains and pulses borrowed by a Baiga from his neighbour or money taken by him from a friend on a market day are not treated as borrowings by him. Sometimes the Baiga do not charge any interest on such transactions and they have, therefore, developed a carefree attitude about them. But they extend this notion further and treat even the interest bearing transactions on the same footing. Questioned about their total borrowings they exclude such borrowings by habit. It is with great difficulty that they are persuaded to give details of tribal borrowings. General illiteracy and ignorance about debt is another difficulty that comes in the way. A literate Baiga is a curious being in the Baiga land. Ordinarily he cannot count beyond 10 or 20. He can hardly calculate the duration of loan or interest charged on it. His daily activities are measured from the market day and the yearly time table is caculated by seasons. How much he borrowed, when and at what rate of interest, how much he had repaid and what balance still stands—most of the Baiga cannot answer such questions with confidence or accuracy. The debt is sometimes connected with his private family affairs. It is then quite difficult to collect information about it through questions. At least an 'alien' cannot befriend a Baiga in a casual manner to reach the depth of his intimate problems. In fact, the outsiders have always been approaching him for questioning and have made him indifferent towards such enquiries. Besides, where a Baiga owes debt to a Mahajan, he is not prepared to incur his wrath, for he knows that in the absence of any alternative agency of credit, he must depend upon the Mahajan. Disclosure of the amount of debt or the rate of interest charged on it will displease the Sahukar and deprive Baiga of the credit facilities which he at present gets from his money-lender. Nor would a Baiga disclose his debt for seeking relief from the Government. He has such a high sense of honour over repayment that it never strikes him to apply for its reduction or cancellation to a third party. The investigator, therefore, has to surmount Baiga's psychological notions about his debt, pierce through illiteracy and ignorance, and temporarily take Baiga out of the chains of mental slavery to the Mahajan. Even when one succeeds in crossing these hurdles, one cannot claim arithmetical accuracy for the data collected. It remains a game of approximations.

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* Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee Report, (C.P. & Berar) Vol I. p. 135.

Method and area of enquiry

Inspite of the above difficulties inherent in the situation an attempt was made to ascertain a representative debt position of the Baiga villages of different cultural regions. Since it was not possible to collect data regarding debt from any official and non-official source, the method of direct enquiry was followed. 350 families were questioned in the Baiga Chak and Dindori, Mandla, Mungeli, Baihar and Kawardha tehsils where the Baiga population is heavily concentrated. The questionnaire of the enquiry collected not only the statistics but also information about Baiga's attitude regarding debt, his opinion about rate of interest and mahajan's malpractices which throw light not only on the economic aspect of indebtedness but also on the social notions of the Baiga tribe. Detailed results of such enquiry have been discussed in the subsequent pages. But the need for caution may be emphasized again, that these data disclose only the general position of debt among the Baiga; and it would be a very bold assertion one would like to avoid, if any statistical accuracy is claimed for them.

The following table shows the average debt per family among the indebted in different parts of the Baiga region:—

AVERAGE DEBT PER FAMILY AMONG INDEBTED (1951-52)

Region	Number of Families indebted	Debt in kind		Average debt in kind per family		Debt of money		Average money debt per family		Total average debt per family among indebted.	
		Mds.	Srs.	Mds.	Srs.	Rs.	as.	Rs.	as.	Rs.	as.
Baiga Chak	4	3	10	0	32	171	0	42	12	50	12
Dindor Tehsil	27	68	17	2	21	606	0	22	7	47	11
Mandla ,,	54	280	27	5	7	3,131	0	58	0	109	12
Mungeli ,,	7	6	32	0	38	160	0	22	13	32	5
Kawardha ,,	14	30	0	2	5	221	5	15	13	37	1
Baihar ,,	27	85	10	3	6	343	0	12	11	44	3
For whole Baiga land	133	474	17	3	11	4,632	5	34	13	70	7

Average Debt in kind per family among the indebted = 3 Mds. - 11 Srs.

Money Equivalent = Rs. 35 - as. 10.

Average debt in money per family among the indebted = Rs. 34 - as. 13.

Average Total Debt per family among the indebted = Rs. 70 - as. 7.

Comparison with average debt per family in the rural areas

The average debt per family among the indebted Baigas comes to nearly Rs. 70. Viewed as an absolute figure and divorced from the economic environment of the tribe, the average debt per family may appear to be low and in the words of the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, "The aboriginals have practically no credit and as a rule, are not indebted."* Compared with the average debt per cultivator family of the State as a whole, which was Rs. 227/- in 1929, certainly the amount looks smaller. But such comparison is misleading for

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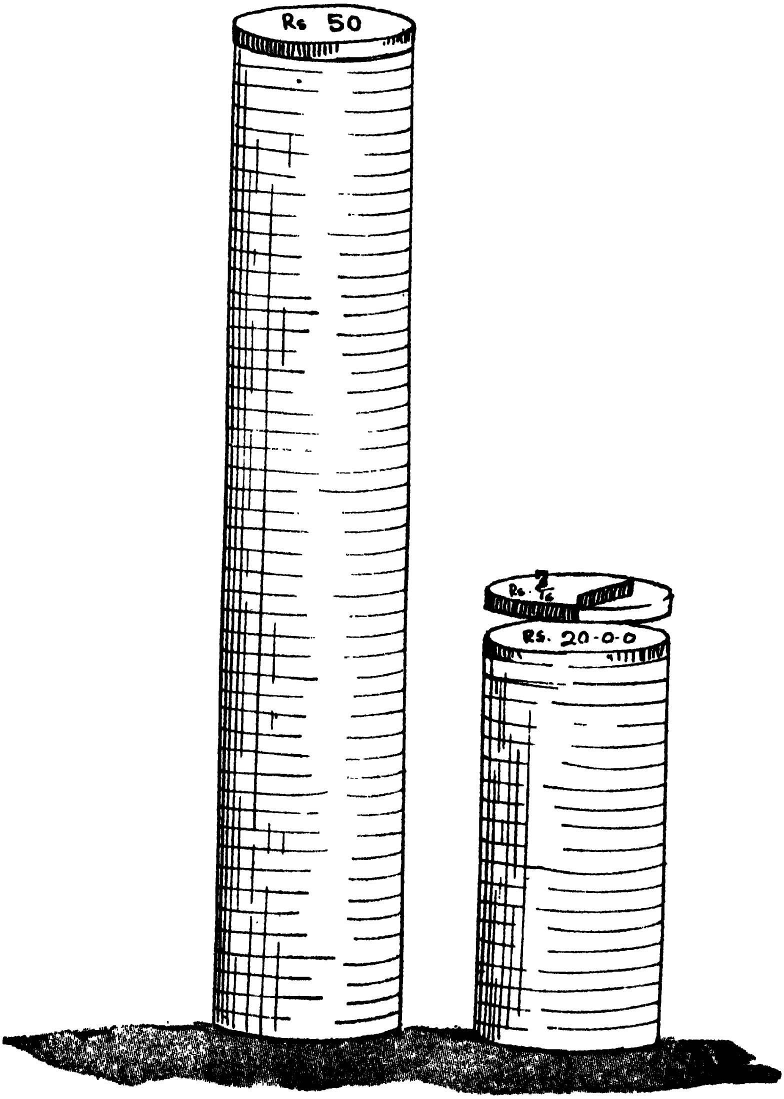
*Note on Chhindwara District prepared by the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee (C.P. & Berar), Vol II, Appendices, p. 698.

AVERAGE DEBT PER FAMILY IN THE BAIGA LAND



Rs. 50-0-0 + Rs. 20-7-0 = Rs. 70-7-0,

agricultural conditions differ widely over the whole State. Particularly when the technique of production, occupational distribution and the general pattern of economy of backward tracts are taken into consideration the disparities emerge in bolder relief. The yield per acre, income from subsidiary occupations, per capita income and the rate of saving in the Baiga villages, as shown in the earlier pages, are definitely lower than in the more advanced tracts of the State. Such zonal disparities in the incidence of agricultural debt were also discovered by the Banking Enquiry Committee as will be clear from the following table:—

TABLE SHOWING DISPARITY IN INCIDENCE OF DEBT IN DIFFERENT ZONES OF MADHYA PRADESH (1929-30).

Zones	Incidence of debt per family
	Rs.
Cotton Zone	555
Rice Zone	59
Wheat Zone	296
Plateau Zone	82
Baiga Zone (Surveyed by us)	70
Average for the whole Province	227

Viewed in the background of the Plateau Zone, where economic conditions are to a great extent similar to those prevailing in the Baiga Zone, the picture shows more consistency. The disparity between the incidence of debt per cultivator family in the whole Plateau Zone and the incidedce of debt per Baiga family is not very wide. But the burden of debt on an average Baiga family may be considered higher than on the ordinary cultivator of the Zone in view of the former's low income and general backwardness. However, it would be safer to conclude that the burden of debt is as much on the Baiga as on the ordinary cultivator family; and the opinion of the Banking Enquiry Committee that the 'aboriginals are, as a rule, not indebted' cannot be accepted in toto.

Certainly the average debt of a Baiga is less than of some sections of population in the State, but it would be wrong to assume that Baigas are mostly free from debt, or that the burden of debt on them is remarkably less than on the ordinary cultivators. In fact, a Baiga is exposed more to the evils of debt due to his ignorance and other socio-economic handicaps. After quoting lengthy extracts on debt cases from the reports of District officers prepared on the aboriginal problem in the State, Grigson remarked, "these suffice, I think, to show that protective measures are necessary and that it is not safe any longer to leave the aboriginal at the mercy of the exploiter."* The results of our survey of 350 Baiga families confirm Grigson's remarks that the Baiga are as much suffering under the burden of debt as the ordinary cultivator of the Plateau Zone. Even passage of time has not changed the situation materially. To what extent and in what manner the recent rise in agricultural prices has affected the economic position of the Baiga is, however, discussed ahead.

Regionwise Average Debt per family

A regionwise analysis of average debt per Baiga family discloses some variations in the burden of debt in different areas surveyed. As will be seen in the above table the average debt per family among the indebted is Rs. 109 in the Mandla Tehsil and Rs. 32 in the Mungeli Tehsil. The high incidence of debt in the Mandla Tehsil is mainly due to the non-repayment of loans by the Baiga of Kanha Forest village. This village alone accounts for roughly two thousand rupees out of a debt of rupees six thousand still not paid by Baigas of Mandla. Poor crops appear to be the main reason for non-repayment. Out of the total number of 12 families of Kanha who borrowed loans, 11 had taken loans for maintenance, seeds or for purchasing cattle. Poor return from previous year's crops did not enable them to clear their debts. There is another aspect of high debt in the Kanha village. Out of a total money debt of Rs. 1,370 borrowed by the Baiga of Kanha nearly Rs. 305 were owed to Baigas and the Government and the remaining amount Rs. 1,065 was advanced by the Mahajans. it is clear that the debtors of Kanha have fallen into the grip of moneylenders who are exploiting the situation to their best advantage. Except Kanha, the position in other Baiga villages surveyed in the Mandla tehsil appears to be normal.

The lowest figures of debt have been recorded in the Mungeli tehsil of Bilaspur district. Here the Baiga villages are far away from the bazar and therefore moneylenders have not reached this tract. Out of 22 families who had borrowed in the villages surveyed, only 2 had taken loan from the Sahukar, the remaining 20 loan transactions were among the Baiga themselves. It may be inferred that where borrowing is within the tribe the indebtedness will be lower unless other factors disturb the normal working of primitive customs and practices. The region of Kawardha tehsil which registers an average debt of Rs. 37 per family exhibits practically the same debt position with slight variation of Rs. 5 towards a higher point. The Dindori and Baihar tehsils show an average debt of Rs. 47 and Rs. 44 per family respectively. In these two tehsils debt position is representative of the normal conditions with regard to debt in the Baiga tribe. Though aboriginals of Baihar are more advanced in agriculture the Baiga of this area do not show any marked improvement in their economic conditions as a result of acculturisation. In both the tehsils Baiga villages are still inaccessible by main roads or railway. However, cultivation of money crops is becoming increasingly popular and the petty trader and moneylender have established themselves well at important strategic places in both the regions. Hence the average debt per family is higher than that of Mungeli and Kawardha.

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*Grigson : 'The Aboriginal Problem in C.P. & Berar' (1944) p. 193.

The case of the Baiga Chak requires special explanation as it appears to be an exception to the generalisation that greater the isolation from the moneylender, the lower the amount of indebtedness. The Chak is in the interior most part of the Baiga land and yet shows an average debt of Rs. 50 per family, which is higher than of the more open areas of Dindori and Baihar Tehsils. It is only one village namely Jhilon which is responsible for this state of affairs in the Chak. All other villages numbering 5 have discharged their debts. Even in Jhilon itself out of 21 total number of families, only four were not able to repay their debt. Out of the four indebted, two families had borrowed a loan of Rs. 85 for marriage, the total outstanding loan of the village being nearly Rs. 201. Marriage expenses are of an extraordinary nature and an aboriginal like Baiga with very meagre chances of saving, cannot repay such loans within a year. Hence the heavy amount of indebtedness is shouldered by only four families causing a high average of indebtedness per family in a comparatively isolated tract where the percentage of families free from debt is as high as 95.6.

So far we have analysed the position of those Baiga families who had borrowed either grain or money, but they had not yet cleared their debts. However, there is another category of Baigas who had taken loans but had cleared them at the time of our enquiry. Theoretically these families should be regarded (and they have been regarded as such while calculating the average debt per family) free from debt. But there is another aspect of the question which deserves careful consideration in view of the nature of the Baiga economy and the purpose for which loan is borrowed creating a cycle of borrowing in the tribe. As discussed earlier Baiga lives in a deficit economy or at the most on the margin.* A slight decline in crop, or extra social expenditure throws him over-board. He is compelled to borrow either for maintenance or for seeds. During the course of our observation it was found that even those who had cleared their debts were likely to borrow again after a few months for their consumption needs or seeds. In fact, this class remains out of debt only for a short period. Only a good crop, (and only two years out of ten bring them a good crop) can enable it to balance its budget without borrowing. Normally, then, this section remains in debt with a gap of a few months in the year and therefore interest charges regularly enter into its annual budget. That these families show a lower-average debt than those still in debt is true, but at the same time they also suffer under the evils of debt is clear from the following table :—

AVERAGE DEBT PER FAMILY AMONG THOSE WHO HAD CLEARED THEIR DEBT (1951-52)

Region	Number of families who have cleared debts	Total debt in kind	Average debt in kind per family	Total debt in money	Average money debt per family	Total average debt per family
		Mds. Srs.	Mds. Srs.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.
Baiga Chak	32	126 30	3 38	126 2	3 15	43 7
Dindori	9	4 9	0 19	324 12	36 1	40 13
Mandla	2	...	...	37 0	18 8	18 8
Mungeli	16	26 22	1 26	47 12	2 15	19 7
Kawardha	5	9 30	1 38	...	...	19 8
Baihar	4	10 00	2 22	31 6	7 13	33 5
Total	68	177 21		567 0		
Average			2 24		8 5	34 7

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* Refer chapter on Standard of Living.

Percentage of families free from debt

The extent of indebtedness can also be measured by ascertaining the percentage of families under debt and free from debt. Our enquiry revealed that out of total number of 350 families surveyed 217 were either completely free from debt or had cleared their debts; while 133 were found still under debt at the time of investigation. Thus 62 per cent of the families were free from debt and 38 per cent were still under debt. Viewed in the set of conditions prevalent in the State as a whole, the debt position among the Baiga does not appear to be as happy as the assumption that 'the debt is negligible among the aboriginals'. The Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee had calculated that the percentage of persons free from debt varied from 13 to 70 in this Province. Investigation of debt among the Baiga, however, reveals that the percentage of persons free from debt does not exceed 62 and that on average 38 per cent of families are still in debt; while the percentage of the persons completely free from debt varies from 20 to 95 in various Baiga regions surveyed. Two important facts should be considered before the percentage of persons free from debt, according to our enquiry, is finally accepted. Logically it may be correct to consider those persons free from debt who were found to have cleared their debt at the time of enquiry. But as discussed earlier, this section of debtors remains out of debt only for a very short period in the year. Therefore, empirically these borrowers may be classified as debtors for they are regular borrowers, although actually not found in debt at the time of enquiry. If the argument is accepted, the debt position of the Baiga does not appear to be happy. Out of 350 families surveyed 201 (that is 57 per cent) were in debt including those temporarily out of debt. The percentage of the Baiga families free from debt, thus, does not exceed 43. The following table sums up the position regionwise :—

PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES

(*a*) *Under debt.*

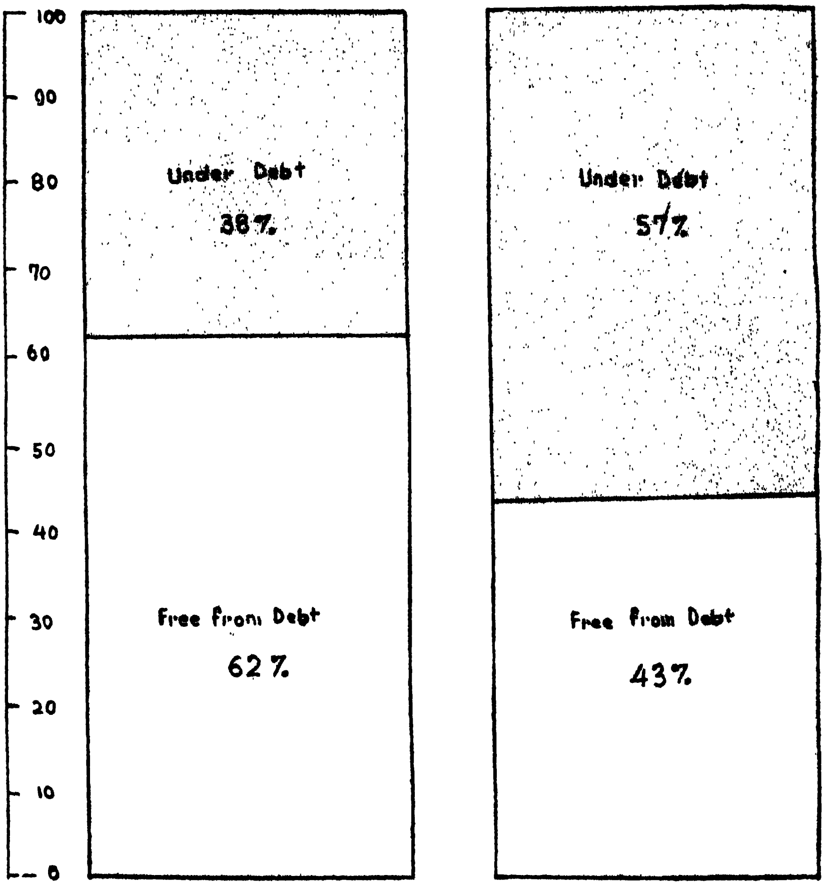
(*b*) *Who had borrowed but cleared their debt.*

(*c*) *Free from debt.*

(1951-52)

Region	Total number of families surveyed	Number of families under debt	Percentage to total No. of families	No. of families who had cleared their debts	Percentage to total No. of families	No. of families free from debt	Percentage to total No. of families	Percentage of families free from debt (who either did not borrow or had cleared their debt
Baiga Chak	91	4	4.4	32	35.2	55	60.4	95.6
Dindori	57	27	47.4	9	15.8	21	36.8	52.6
Mandla	68	54	79.4	2	2.9	12	17.7	20.6
Mungeli	52	7	13.4	16	30.8	29	55.8	86.6
Kawardha	27	14	51.9	5	18.5	8	29.6	48.1
Baihar	55	27	49.09	4	7.27	24	43.64	50.91
Whole Baiga land	350	133	38	68	19	149	43	62

PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES UNDER DEBT AND FAMILIES FREE FROM DEBT



Case No. 1. Case No. 2.

Note : Under case 1 families who borrowed loans and cleared it are not treated as indebted.

Under case 2 families who borrowed and cleared it are treated as indebted because they are marginal families and are likely to fall in debt again.

Percentages :

(a)	Percentage of families completely free from debt	62
(b)	Percentage of families under debt	38
(c)	Percentage of families free from debt (if those who had cleared their debt but are likely to borrow again are included among the indebted)	43
(d)	Percentage of families under debt (if those who had cleared their debt but are likely to borrow again due to low yeild are included among the indebted)	57

Certain interesting facts emerge regarding different regions on examining the above table. The Baiga Chak records the highest percentage of families free from debt—95.6. How population of the Baiga Chak has escaped from the evil of indebtedness is explained by its socio-economic conditions. The Chak is comparatively less accessible to outsiders and therefore the money-lender does not think it profitable to spread his business in this area. The Forest Department administers all the villages situated in the Chak and does not permit free movement of traders or moneylenders. Consequently the Chak Baiga are not so much exposed to exploitation by outsiders. Most of the loan transactions are, therefore, confined within the tribe. Tribal sanctions act as a check upon the defaulters except where the delay in repayment is justified by the pressing conditions of the debtor. The next highest percentage of persons free from debt (86.6) is obtained in the Mungeli tehsil of Bilaspur district—an area adjoining the southern part of the Baiga Chak where similar conditions of isolation and tribal transactions are found. In other regions namely Dindori, Kawardha and Baihar the percentages are 52.6, 48.1 and 50.91 respectively. Mandla records a very low percentage of persons free from debt—20 per cent. Out of 68 Baiga families, 54 families were found in debt. The average debt per family was also as high as Rs. 109 in this region. The Sahukars are well-established in the Mandla tehsil and have spread their tentacles far and wide. They seem to have entrapped even the Baiga living on hill-tops or in the valleys. For out of 56 families who borrowed money or grain, 40 had fallen prey to the Mahajan. It need hardly be mentioned that once the aboriginal borrower is dragged into the moneylender's spider-web, it is very difficult for him to come out of it. Hence the high percentage of indebted families in the Mandla region. Unfortunately this area also records quite a high average money debt—namely Rs. 58/- per family. The situation will appear more poignant when the fact is taken into consideration that it is easier for the Baiga cultivator to repay the grain loan than cash loan; the reason is that a good crop enables Baiga to repay the loan in grain easily while conversion of his grain into cash for repaying his cash loan involves him in losses both due to the declining prices at the time of harvest and the middlemen's unavoidable grabbings.

Loans in grain

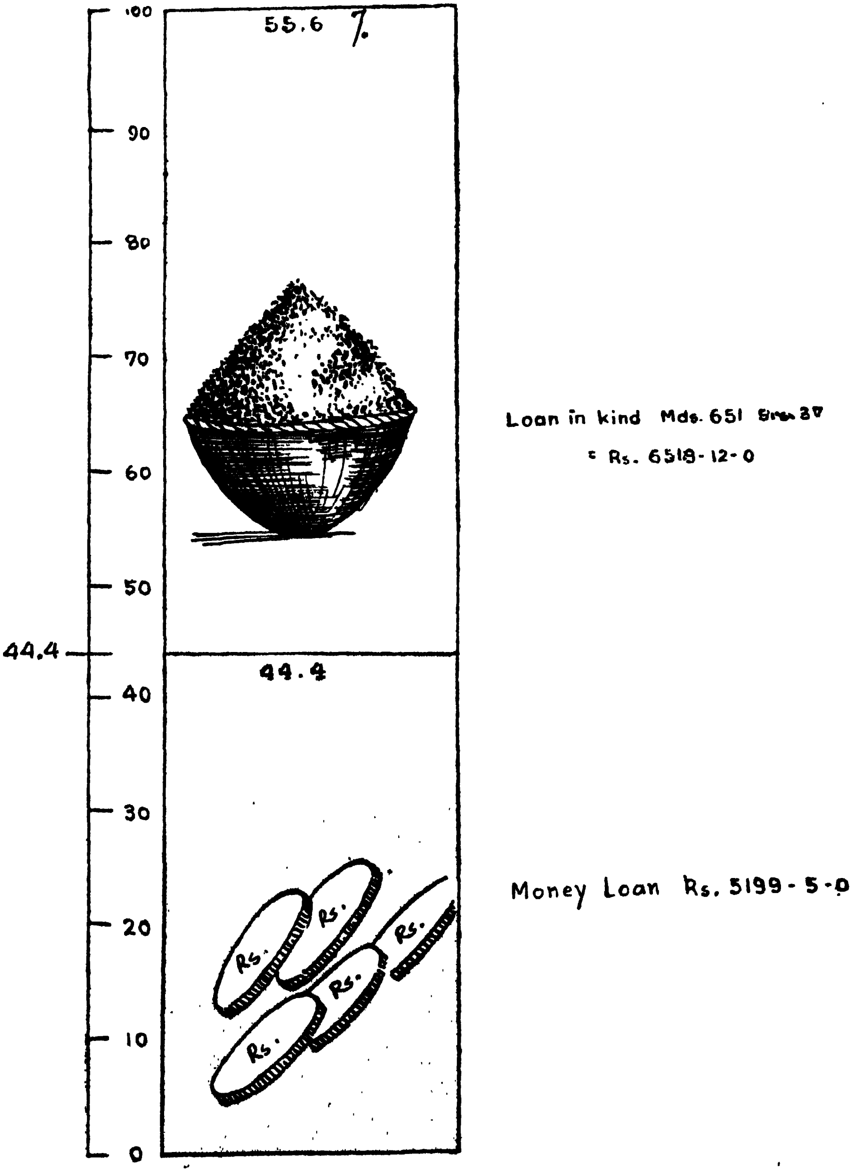
The incidence of debt analysed from this angle bears some relation to the average debt per family. Wherever the percentage of cash loans is higher than grain loans, generally speaking the average debt per family is also found higher. The reason is: Baiga finds it more difficult to repay the money loans and, therefore, money loans remain outstanding. The following table indicates the proportion of grain and money loans in different regions :—

PROPORTION OF GRAIN LOANS AND CASH LOANS

Region	Total debt	Grain loans	Money equivalent of grain loans	Percentage of col.3 to total debt	Cash loans	Percentage of col.6 to total debt
	Rs. as.	Mds. Srs.	Rs. as.		Rs. as.	
Baiga Chak	1,597 2	130 0	1,300 0	81.4	297 2	18.6
Dindori	1,657 6	72 26	726 10	43.8	930 12	56.2
Mandla	5,975 0	280 27	2,807 0	46.9	3,168 0	53.1
Mungeli	541 6	33 14	333 10	61.5	207 12	39.5
Kawardha	618 13	39 30	397 8	64.5	221 5	35.8
Baihar	1,329 6	95 20	955 0	71.9	374 6	28.1
For whole Baiga land	11,719 1		6,519 12	55.6	5,199 5	44.4

Note :—The total debt has been calculated by adding the total quantity of grain debt repaid and the total quantity of grain debt outstanding plus total amount of money repaid and the money debt still outstanding.

PROPORTION OF MONEY AND GRAIN LOANS TO TOTAL LOANS.



In the Mandla district where the average total debt per family is Rs. 109/-, the percentage of money loans is sufficiently high—56. Dindori also depicts the same conditions with slightly less average debt per family. The Baiga Chak of course *prima facie* presents a contrary case. But as pointed out earlier only two families of the Jhilon village in the Chak are mainly responsible for inflating the indebtedness of the Chak. If we iron out these abnormal cases, the average debt would be found just half of the present average debt per family. Some doubt may arise in the case of Baihar tehsil which is definitely more advanced. Here as low a percentage of money loans as 28 goes against the general assumption that economic progress and money economy go together. But if the location of Baiga villages of Baihar tehsil is taken into consideration, it will become clear that in this region, too, the Baiga live in interior parts, at least far away from roads and railway lines. Comparatively their isolation is less, but still it has kept the basic features of primitive economy intact. Low percentage of cash loans in the predominantly Baiga areas—Baiga Chak, Mungeli and Kawardha tehsils—prove that commodity is the main base of loan transactions in Baiga economy. Since these areas have not been opened up, the moneylender's hold is comparatively less. Most of loan transactions are within the tribe. In future in any scheme of credit supply, therefore, it must be borne in mind that Baigas left to themselves would always prefer borrowing and repayment in kind to that in cash. They take recourse to money loan only when they purchase articles of consumption directly from some weekly market or when the creditor insists on repayment in cash. Ordinarily the isolated section is habituated to a grain barter system. But where moneylender has penetrated into the Baiga economy as in the Mandla tehsil or where the villages are near roads and markets like Khamaria, Basania, Ufri and Ladvani of Dindori tehsil, there is a growing tendency towards cash transactions. Dindori and Mandla tehsils record as high a percentage of money transactions as 53 to 56. The Baiga economy in these regions is fast becoming a money economy due to cultivation of the money crops, development of markets at Bajag, Gorakhpur, Gadasari, Dindori, Bamni and the construction of all-weather roads and the railway track. Money has already taken the place of grain in the loan system. In the absence of any check on the moneylender or development measures to bring the Baiga debtor on an equal footing with the *Sahukar*, the former are bound to suffer and their debt burden is sure to rise.

Incidence of debt per rupee of revenue paid

The proportion of debt to the amount of land revenue paid by the cultivator also roughly shows the incidence of debt upon the borrower.

The relationship between the debt and land revenue has more scientific basis where the land revenue is determined by the proprietor of the land. However the conditions obtained in the Baiga villages are different. The Baiga villages are either Forest villages in which the Forest Department administer the whole show or the Ryatwari villages where the Malguzar could not enhance the rates as he liked. In the forest villages land revenue is assessed not on the area cultivated, but on the number of ploughs maintained by the cultivator. Similarly the rate of Bewars is fixed according to their number and not the area of each Bewar. In fact the land revenue is not a major portion of cost of cultivation in the case of dwellers of forest villages. In the initial stages of organising forest villages cultivating rights were freely conferred upon the residents of forest villages. Inspite of these differing conditions the ratio between the debt and the revenue is a rough indicator of debt incidence even in the Baiga region. The following table brings to light incidence of debt on per rupee of land revenue paid by the indebted Baigas :—

RATIO OF DEBT TO LAND REVENUE (1951-52)

Region	Total amount of debt	Total amount of land revenue	Incidence of debt per rupee of land revenue paid
	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.
Baiga Chak	203 8	8 0	25 7
Dindori	1,290 0	75 5	17 2
Mandla	5,938 0	98 4	60 7
Mungeli Kawardha	Since the Padaria Zamindari and Kawardha were merged into the state recently, Land settlement etc. are in fluid position.		
Baihar	1,195 8	38 8	31 7
Total	8,627 0	220 1	39 3

Note :— (a) The total amount of debt of the indebted = Total quantity of grain loans plus total amount of cash loans.

(b) Interest charges at the rate of 50 per cent have been added to the capital of grain loans.

(c) Interest charges at the rate of 33¼ per cent. added to the capital of cash loan.

DISTRIBUTION OF DEBT

	Families owing debt between Rs. 1-20	Families owing debt between Rs.21-40	Families owing debt between Rs.41-60	Families owing debt between Rs.61-80	Families owing debt between Rs. 81-100	Families owing debt between Rs. 101-120	Families owing debt between Rs. 121-140	Families owing debt between Rs. 141-160	Families owing debt between Rs. 161 180	Families owing debt between Rs. 181-200	Families owing debt above Rs. 200
	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.
Amount of debt under the group	433 10	1,036 5	55 0	960 10	710 8	470 0	1.030 0	157 8	342 0	563 0	3.469 15
Number of families under the group	36	36	11	13	8	4	8	1	2	3	11
Percentage of the total number of families	27%	27%	8.3%	9.9%	6.0%	3.0%	6.0%	0.75%	1.5%	2.25%	8.3%
		54.2%—Rs. 3,232 7 as.					8.25%				

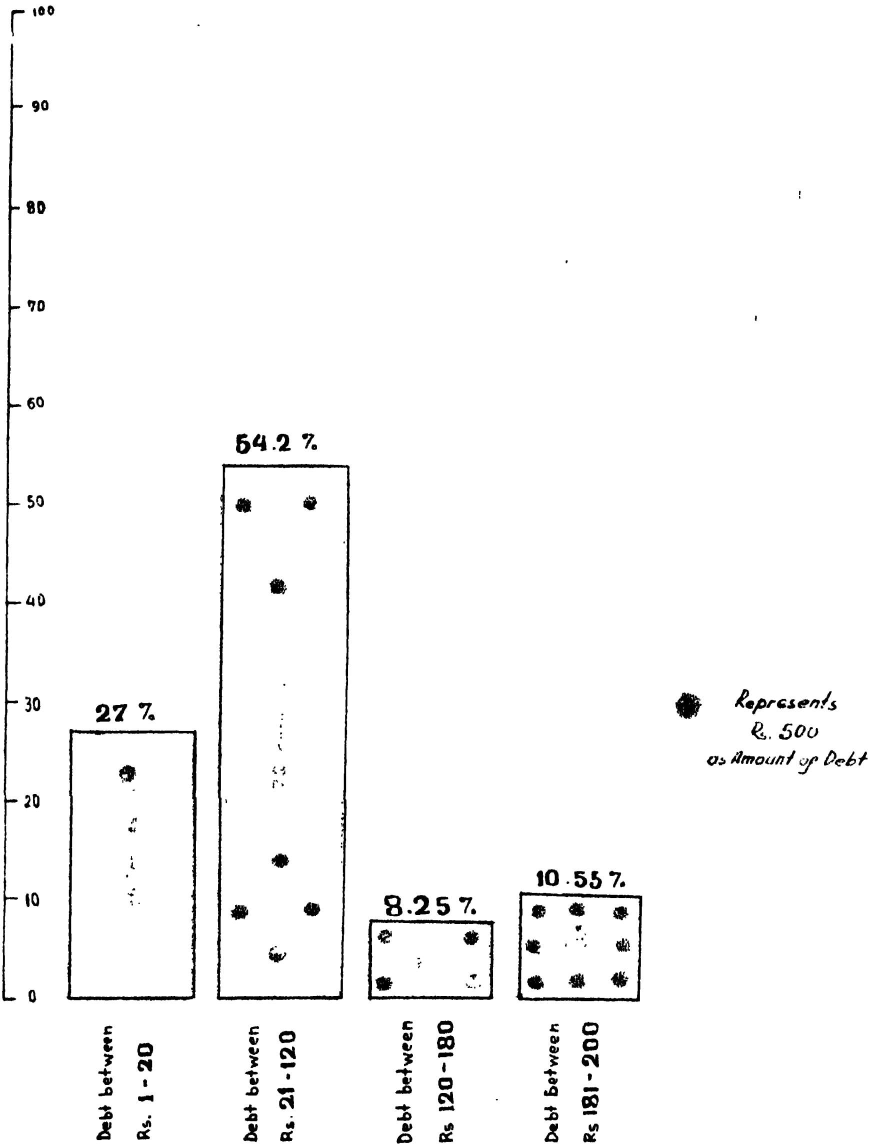
Distribution of Debt

Distribution of debt among the indebted indicates the burden of indebtedness on different sections of the tribe. The table reveals that 8.3 per cent families are hopelessly indebted, as their average debt per family exceeds Rs. 200/- and the total amount of debt owed by this class is as high as Rs. 3,469/15/-. On the other extreme 27 per cent of the families owing a total debt of Rs. 433/10/-, fall in the debt group of Rs. 1-20. In between these two extreme classes of debtors nearly 54.2 per cent of the families owe a debt between Rs. 21/- and Rs. 120/-. They represent the class of average debtors who borrow intermediate loans and the repayment in their case largely depends upon the conditions of harvest. But as is well known. agriculture is a precarious industry—more so in tribal areas where human effort has not made it secure against the vagaries of nature. In ten years, the cultivator does not get more than two normal crops in the State. Thus borrowers of loans for agricultural operations are always on the fence—a slight gust of adverse wind can push them into debt. Families owing a debt above Rs. 141 -/- may be considered heavily indebted and need immediate relief to start afresh in their occupations.

OVER-ALL INCIDENCE OF DEBT (YEAR 1951-52)

Region	Average debt per family	Percentage of families under debt	Incidence of debt per rupee of revenue paid	Incidence of debt per rupee of income	Incidence of debt per rupee of interest paid
	Rs. as.		Rs. as.	Rs. as. ps.	Rs. as. ps.
Baiga Chak	50 12	60.4	25 7	0 0 1.6	0 4 5
Dindori	47 11	36.8	17 2	0 1 6	0 4 9
Mandla	109 12	17.7	60 7	0 3 10	0 4 7
Mungeli	32 5	55.8	...	0 2 2.6	0 4 10
Kawardha	37 1	29.6	...	0 1 0	0 4 9
Baihar	44 8	43.64	31 7	0 1 0	0 6 1
Average or percentage	70 7	38	39 0	0 1 5	0 4 10

DISTRIBUTION OF BURDEN OF INDEBTEDNESS AMONG THE INDEBTED



Before discussing other aspects of Baiga's indebtedness it is essential to note down the *facts regarding the extent and incidence of debt* so far analysed.

(a) Nearly 38 per cent of the families surveyed were under debt among the Baiga.

(b) The average debt per indebted Baiga family was found to be about Rs. 70/-.

(c) The incidence of debt was found as the highest among the Baiga of Mandla tehsil.

(d) The percentage of grain loans to total amount of debt varies from 43 to 81.

(e) The higher the percentage of money loans, the greater the incidence of debt.

(f) Wherever the moneylender has spread his buisness, the incidence of debt is high.

Effect of the Second World War on Baiga's indebtedness

During the last fifteen years there has been a considerable change in the agricultural and industrial prices. The rise in prices has not affected all the sections of the people uniformally, nor are adequate statistics regarding debt position of various sections available for comparison. No data are available on the volume of pre-war debt of the Baiga and therefore it is difficult to give a comparative picture with any accuracy. However, certain trends are perceptible in Baiga's economic life which indicate the effects of War and Post-War conditions on the burden and volume of his debt. Enquiries made in other States regarding the effect of rise in prices on rural debt also enable us to have some rough idea about Baiga's position. Dr. B. Narayanswami Naidu, after making exhaustive investigations on the subject in the rural areas of Madras, arrived at the conclusion : the tenants and the landless labourers, the lowest among the agricultural hierarchy have run into greater debt and their economic position has deteriorated. The small holders, in greatest need of relief, have received the least benefit. The big landlords have experienced a higher rate of reduction of debt than the medium land-holders...the ability to save and repay debt has been mainly enjoyed by the richer classes and they have varied with their disposable margin...it is thus clear that war-time effects have been more beneficial to bigger than to the medium landholders while the small holders have actually suffered.'* The Woodhead Famine Enquiry Commission had also come to the same conclusion and described the situation in the following words, "Small holders, as a class, have not benefitted materially. It is true that the market value of their holdings has risen greatly. Those who supplement their income by other forms of labour have also been helped by the prevailing high level of employment and wages. Again in some parts of the country family allotments by soldiers have added to income. Against these circumstances must be set, however, the important fact that the amount of produce normally sold by small holders for payment of revenue, rent and repayment of debt is relatively small and there has been a substantial rise in prices of consumer goods usually purchased by them. It, therefore, appears probable that the indebtedness of this class speaking generally may not have been reduced substantially in many parts of the country".† The Gadgil Committee on Rural Finance examind the question from another angle but arrived at a similar conclusion in these words, "It might be possible to hazard the opinion that the total indebtedness in terms of money stood in 1944 at a level lower than that in 1939, but that, at a later date, forces were already in operation leading to an incrrse in the amount of this total indebtedness. The upward trend of the prices of agricultural products appeared to be held in check. The rise in the level of agricultural costs had mostly caught up with increase in the prices of agricultural products and had in some instances even passed it. "‡ The Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee**, and other eminent economists (like Shri Mani Lal B. Nanavati†† and Prof. C. N. Vakil)‡‡ also concur with the findings of the above expert committee.

Before we study the impact of price rise on Baiga's debt position in the light of the findings of experts, it is worthwhile to recapitulate some basic facts about Baiga' economic status. Firstly, Baiga is partly a food gatherer and partly a petty cultivator and a forest worker. Secondly, he produces mainly food grains and very little of money crops. Thirdly, he has a very little disposable surplus of his crops. Fourthly, being a dweller of forests and hill-tops his contact with the market and the price changes is very casual. Fifthly, since 57 per cent of the Baiga families were found involved in debt, their little surplus grain must have been seized either by the Sahukars or the agents of grain merchants in discharge of their debt

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*Report of the Economist for Enquiry into Rural Indebtedness, Madras (1946) by Dr. B. V. Narayanswami Naidu, p. 50 and 57.

†Report of the Famine Enquiry Commission (Final Report, 1945) p. 300.

‡Report of the Agricultural Finance Sub-Committee, Pp. 7–8.

**Report of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee, Pp. 89–92.

††The Indian Rural Problem, p. 240.

‡‡Prof. C. N. Vakil's Foreward to "The Myth of Agricultural Prosperity."

These features of the Baiga economy give us the clue to the effects of rise in prices on the volume of Baiga's debt. Being a petty cultivator and food gatherer his main object is to meet his own food requirements rather than to dispose of his produce in the market for reaping the benefits of the rise in prices. Had he even desired to produce for the market, his limitations in the form of small farm, little capital, crude technique of production and general backwardness would have thwarted his ambitions. Since the proportion of money crops is low in his total production, he felt little attraction for going to the market to get the benefits of rising prices. The yield per acre is so low that he has an insignificant surplus (often deficit) for selling in the market at a higher price. Thus he was not in the position of a big cultivator or land-holder taking advantage of the rising agricultural prices. Besides, he lives in isolation completely out of touch with the price variations in the market. The Sahukar or the pedlar is the supplier of information to him—and it is always in the interest of both to quote low prices to the Baiga. And wherever the Baiga were in debt (and nearly 57 per cent of them were found involved in debt transactions) the Sahukar and not Baiga enjoyed the fruits of high price level. Thus, as a producer or seller of agricultural commodities, Baiga did not make any gain. Rise in agricultural prices did not improve their ability to save and repay their debt. Hence there is every reason to believe that Baiga's debt position remains unchanged.

Looked at from another angle the situation appears rather more gloomy. As a producer Baiga did not make much profit in the period of price boom. But as a consumer of certain articles which come from the urbrn areas, he had definitely suffered a loss. Cloth, salt, kerosene oil and imitation ornaments are Baiga's main purchases from the market or the pedlar. Although a Baiga uses much less cloth than the rural people, but whatever little he purchased, he had to pay for it nearly four times pre-war prices. In the absence of control shops of cloth in the tribal weekly markets Baiga had to undergo all the inconveniences caused by the scarcity of cloth during this period. During the course of personal talks with responsible Baigas, it was discovered that high prices of cloth were the greatest complaint of the Baiga tribe. Nanshah, a prominent Baiga of Ladvani village, summed up the position by saying, "a Baiga uses only a langoti to hide his shame. If cloth prices continue to be high, we will have to become Nanga Baiga and Baigin again." This shows how hard the Baiga have been hit by the cloth muddle in our country. For salt and kerosene oil, too, he had to pay and still pays nearly double prices. At the time of enquiry (November 1951) there was a general scarcity of salt in the tribal areas of Dindori tehsil and shopkeepers charged as high a price as 4 seers per rupee. Many Baigas had stopped using Kerosene oil and carried on in night by burning logs which suffocated their houses already without ventilation. As for bangles, beads, trinkets, rings etc. many young boys and girls complained that they could not afford to buy these luxuries any more, for prices had gone out of their buying capacity.

Since no data of Baiga's debt of the pre-war days are available, it is not possible to find out the change in the volume of debt. But the above examination of Baiga's position as a seller of his agricultural produce and buyer of consumer goods, proves that he had no chance of making gains. Rather there was every possibility of incurring more expenditure on consumer goods. Personal observations showed that Baigas had suffered a set back in their economic position, like the petty cultivator or landless labourer. Therefore it can be logically inferred that there has not been any material reduction in Baiga's debt—rather rise in the prices of consumer goods in some cases might have raised the amount of debt, for investigations disclosed that in many cases money was borrowed for buying cloth.

Purposes of Loans

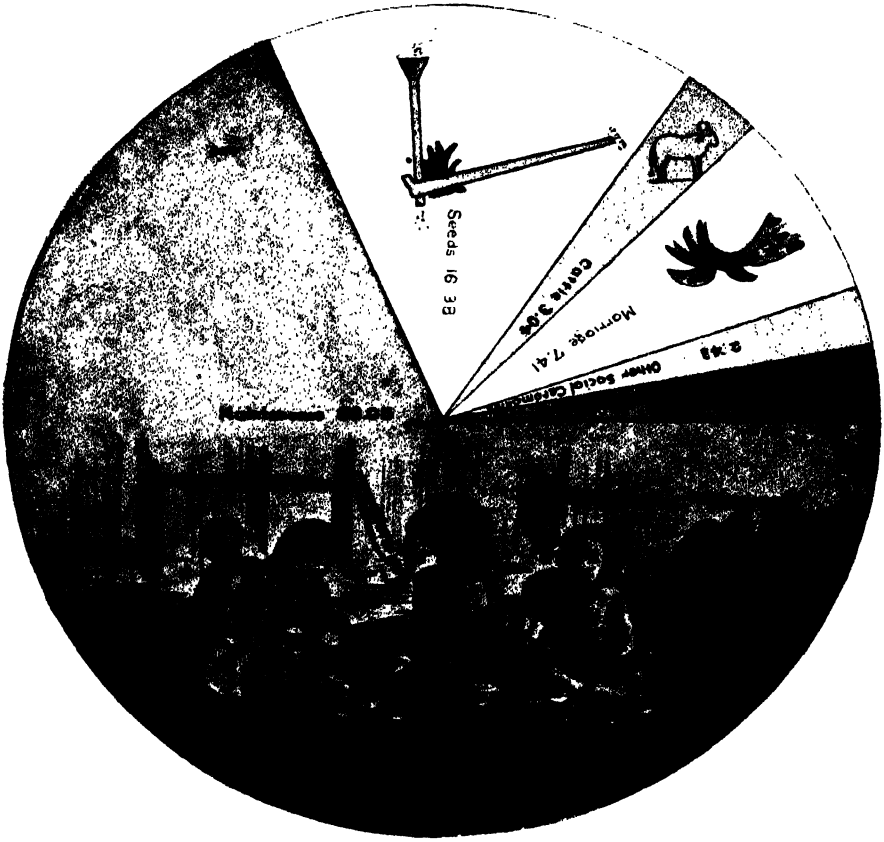
Ordinarily a Baiga will not borrow if he gets normal crops in succession. He will manage for his consumption and seeds both. He will be able to meet his cash requirements either by selling a money crop of Rai or some fibres, leaves and clays in the neighbouring villages or weekly markets. But it may be remembered that Baiga is a petty cultivator. He is always on the margin. A slight reverse in the crop immediately pushes him below the margin, and compels him to borrow either for maintenance or seeds for the next crop. That crop failure and variations in agricultural returns are not uncommon in this State was noted by the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee. 'The history of agriculture shows that, excluding those years of extreme calamity and abnormal bumper harvest, it is quite probable that over a cycle of ten years in not more than two years will the outturn be exactly normal, varying from year to year between, say, 10 annas and 16 annas, i. e., between 25 per cent below and 25 per cent above the average of the normal crop.' Consequently in years of bad crops Baiga requires food grain for maintaining himself and his family and seeds for the next crop. In an average size family the grain deficit does not exced 6-8 maunds as it is partly made up by roots and tubers. He may need another 1-2 maunds of grain for seed. Therefore borrowings for maintenance and seed predominate over all other purposes for which Baigas incur debt. Marriage may also compel a Baiga to borrow. In bad years when his annual budget is in deficit, he may postpone the marriage of his son or brother. But marriage being a social and economic necessity cannot be delayed for long. And as it entails unusual expenditure, it cannot be financed from annual savings. Loan has to be taken for either purchasing bridal dress, *Kodai* and liquor. Besides marriage, some social expenditure is also of obligatory nature. Ceremonies and rituals like Dassehra celebrations, offerings to the family or village gods, presents to the *guniya* or death ceremony are both normal and compulsory expenses in Baiga life. Visits by relations who often live in a radius of 20 to 25 miles also entail some expenditure on drink and feasting. Even if not willing, he must meet the social obligations. Other situations may also crop up, necessitating borrowing. If the bullock dies, he must buy another. A violation of forest laws might push him into debt for he is unable to pay fines from his marginal budget. Some diseseas—like worms in the nose—are considered sin in the tribe and only a feast to the villagers can purify the sinner. If a Baiga has committed adultery or has eloped with other's wife, he must arrange a tribal feast as a punishment in the first case, and compensate the previous husband of his new wife, in the second. How expenditure on drink is a hidden cause of borrowing has been discussed earlier, but it may be noted here that drink is one of the main causes which makes Baiga's budget a deficit one. The table on the next page shows the various purposes for which the Baiga take loan.

The statistical analysis of the purposes of loan shows that over 84 per cent of borrowings are for maintenance and seed. This high percentage of loans for the said purpose may be partly due to poor crops of 1950. But after making a due allowance for this fact, it can be assumed that 60 to 65 per cent of advances are taken for the maintenance of family or seeds. The next important purpose for which a Baiga takes a loan is marriage. 7·41 per cent of the total debt was incurred for meeting expenditure on marriage. In marriage he needs cash to persent to the bride's mother, known as *Sook* in their dialect. If he has not collected some money by selling his surplus crop, he has to take cash advances either from the more resourceful Baiga or the *mahajan* of the area. Nearly 3·04 per cent of debt was found to have been incurred for purchasing cattle ; 2·43 per cent on miscellaneous items like payment of fines for forest offences, purchase of weapons for shikar or utensils like *Kaseri* etc.

PURPOSES OF LOANS (1951-52)

Region	Maintenance	Seeds	Cattle	Repayment of old debt	Marriage	Other social ceremonies	Drink	Miscellaneous
	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.
Baiga Chak	50 0	...	...	...	112 8	...	...	...
Dindori	864 12	100 0	45 0	...	10 0	10 0	...	125 0
Mandla	4.781 15	907 15	203 0	...	293 0	21 0	...	...
Mungeli	63 2	...	...	...	68 12	...	...	120 0
Kawardha	290 0	...	...	...	...	205 0	...	...
Baihar	566 0	585 15	47 8	...	236 0	...	...	17 8
Total	6,615 13	1.592 15	295 8	...	720 4	236 0	...	262 8
Percentage to total debt	68.05	16.38	3.04	...	7.41	2.43	...	2.69

PURPOSES OF LOANS (PERCENTAGE)



It is useful to enquire as to what percentage of loans borrowed by the Baiga is of a productive nature. Nearly 68·05 per cent loans are taken for maintenance. But it seems debt incurred for this item also includes money spent on drink, for during investigation not a single Baiga disclosed that money was also borrowed for liquor. They may not be taking loans specifically for liquor, but the debt incurred for drink if avoided, could enable the Baiga to reduce their borrowings for maintenance. Therefore loans taken for maintenance are indirectly spent away on drink. The main point is : whether the loans taken for consupmtion purpose should be considered productive or unproductive. The answer lies in the combined role of Baiga as entrepreneur, worker, partly supplier of capital and manager in the productive enterprise. Therefore, it would not be wholly incorrect if loans borrowed for maintenance are considered as an expenditure on payment of wages. This brings the percentage of productive loans to nearly 67 (48.05 per cent for maintenance. 16.38 per cent for seeds and 3.04 per cent for purchasing cattle). The percentage of unproductive loans comes to about 33 [7.41 per cent for marriage, 2.43 per cent for other social ceremonies, 20 per cent on drink (guess based on observation) and 2.69 per cent for miscellaneous purposes].

Security for Loans

Unlike the ordinary agriculturist, the very idea of security for loans is exotic to the Baiga. The members of the tribe live so closely to one another and participate in one another's activities—Bewar, hunting, fishing, collection of forest products and observation of rituals and ceremonies—that tribal ties are considered a better security than any tangible property—movable or immovable. As discussed earlier, the Baiga lend grain for seed and consumption among themselves in the spirit of mutual aid and help. Mutual confidence, intimate knowledge of borrower's financial condition and cooperative spirit form the basis of personal security—against which most of the loans are advanced by the Baiga. There was hardly any case of a Baiga accepting security from a member of the tribe. During the course of our investigation we had not come across any example of this type. And in cases of exception, the borrower was either a habitual evader, breaker of tribal laws or it was the influence of alien practice of accepting security. There is, however, an economic reason, too, for the general absence of security, in Baiga's loan system. Baiga does not borrow in a lump sum; when his grain stock is exhausted, he draws upon other's stock as and when he needs it. The creditor Baiga does not know enough arithmetic for calculating the amount of security he should demand against the current grain drawings by the borrower. Moreover, in most of the cases his borrowings are in grain and that too in small quantities. Therefore, security is considered both unnecessary and impracticable.

The general rule of lending against personal credit is, however, not always observed when the lender is a *sahukar*. He insists on substantial security for his advances. Usually, the *mahajan* does not live in the Baiga village. Unlike the caste cultivator, whom the *mahajan* can watch all the year round, Baiga is away from the *mahajan*. Since Baiga lives in a dense forest or on a hilltop, he is accessible with great difficulty. Moreover, he has no right either to transfer, sell or mortgage his tenancy rights in land. His moveable assets are mere crude forms of wood, thatched grass or stone. He is essentially a cultivator of coarse foodgrains or a gatherer of roots and fruits. An average Baiga has hardly any disposable surplus at the harvest. Thus, on the one hand Baiga's poor assets justify *mahajan's* demand for security, on the other they reduce his credit-worthiness to minimum. *His credit-worthiness among all the clients of the Mahajan*, for the caste cultivator or the Gond are regular agriculturists, with cattle, agricultural implements and a house as their moveable and immoveable property. At times agriculturists mortgage their ornaments or utensils with the moneylender. As a producer of money crops, the ordinary agriculturist has a larger disposable surplus with him. In certain areas like Berar, uptil now land was transferable by sale or mortgage. But Baiga is in a quite different position. He has neither a substantial crop surplus, nor a right to mortgage land nor moveable assets of realisable value. Therefore, when a loan becomes an unavoidable necessity, *he surrenders pre-emptive right of purchasing his future crop to the mahajan* as a security for the loan. This makes Baiga's lot worse than that of the cultivator-debtor. The latter after mortgaging some cattle or ornament is free to sell his crop surplus in the market and reap the benefits of price variations. If he loses as a producer by paying high interest, he should be able to compensate himself by selling his produce in the market directly. But Baiga is not free to sell even his meagre produce in the market. He loses both ways—as payer of high interest and as seller at low rates. The *mahajan* plays the role of a pre-emptor-mortgagee to the full. It is not uncommon to see petty traders, pedlars and *mahajans* combing the Baiga villages at the time of harvest for exercising their right of pre-emption. Sometimes Baigas offer tangible security also. Wherever climatic conditions permit, they keep a herd of ten to twenty cattle not for dairy purpose but to sell cows or bullocks. If the *mahajan* insists very much on security for a loan, Baiga's first preference is to mortgage a number of cattle with his debtor. The *mahajan* does not take actual possession of the mortgaged cattle, but leaves them with the debtor, who must pay grazing tax on them. In case the Baiga debtor fails to repay the interest, or capital, the cattle are either taken away by the *mahajan* or sold off on the spot. Squeezed to the last by the pressing circumstances, a Baiga would mortgage the silver ornaments of his *dauhi* (wife). This is the last resort of a Baiga, for not only by it he displeases his wife whom he prizes most among his possessions, but he is also unable to calculate the weight of the ornaments, their purity and the current market rate of bullion. The Sahukar's greed, cunningness, rapacity and malpractices find full scope for exploiting the ignorant Baiga. Advances are over-secured, mortgaged ornaments are not returned, their contents and purity are tempered. But the cases where Baiga has offered ornaments as security are very few. In fact, he has practically nothing moveable or immoveable to offer as security —except his personal labour or the fruits of his hard work. A Baiga's answer on being questioned about the security "my own soul is the security" sums up the situation. The table on page 320 exhibits the proportion of secured and unsecured loans :—

The table discloses that over 91 per cent loans were unsecured. Hardly 8 per cent of borrowings were covered. The high percentage of unsecured loans proves that majority of the Baiga is not able to offer any tangible security for its loans and most of its advances are against personal credit. The figures further corroborate the fact that Baiga's assets are of very little value and he is a marginal borrower. A comparison with the position in the State as a whole discloses that the ordinary cultivator has greater credit-worthiness than the Baiga. The following table shows the comparative picture of the secured and unsecured loans in the State:

PERCENTAGE OF SECURED AND UNSECURED LOANS

Region	Percentage of secured loans	Percentage of unsecured loans
* For the whole State	27.5	72.5
* Plateau Zone	23.4	76.6
Baiga Region	8.07	91.93

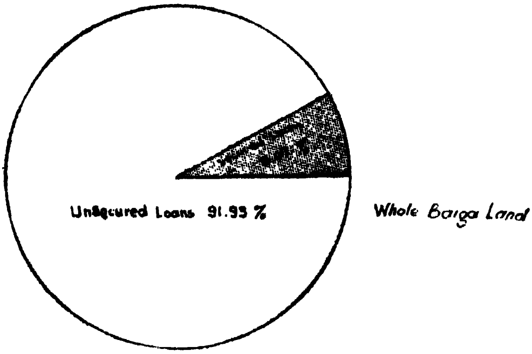
*Figures taken from the Report of the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee (C.P. & Berar) Vol. I. Pp. 104-105.

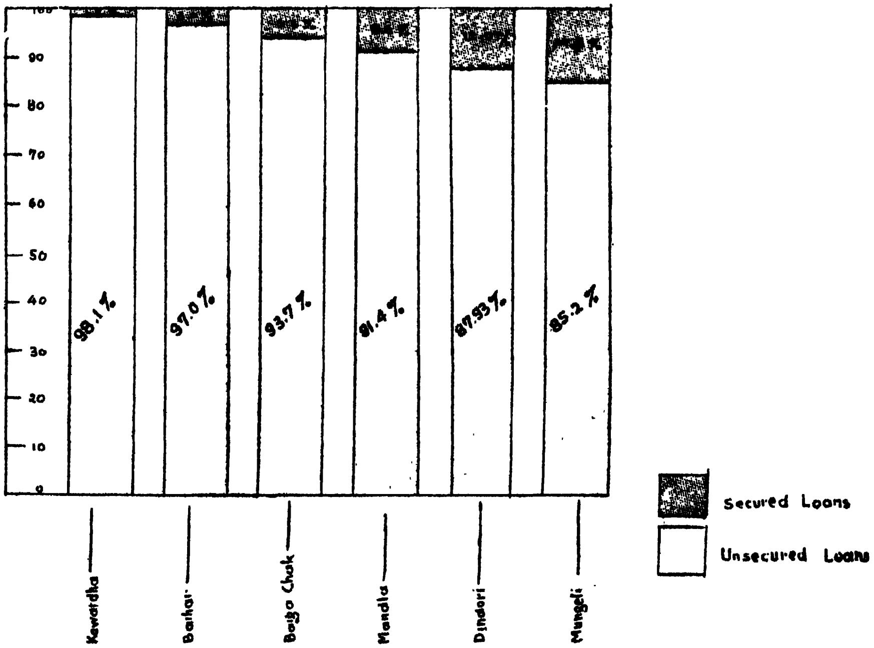
SECURED AND UNSECURED LOANS

Region	Total amount of outstanding debt		Total amount of secured debt		Percentage of secured loans to total debt	Total amount of unsecured loans		Percentage of unsecured loans to total debt	Amount of security offered		Percentage of the amount of security to secured loans
	Rs.	as.	Rs.	as.		Rs.	as.		Rs.	as.	
Baiga Chak	1,597	0	100	0	6.3	1,497	0	93.7	125	0	125
Dindori	1,657	0	200	0	12.07	1.457	0	87.93	450	0	225
Mandla	5.975	0	514	0	8.6	5.461	0	91.4	736	0	145
Mungeli	541	0	80	0	14.8	461	0	85.2	150	0	187.5
Kawardha	618	0	12	0	1.9	606	0	98.1	20	0	160
Baihar	1,329	0	40	0	3	1.289	0	97	110	0	275
Total	11,717	0	946	0	8.07	10.771	0	91.93	1.591	0	168

NOTE :—Total amount of debt includes both outstanding loans as well as loans repaid during the year. This is just to analyse the proportion of secured loans to unsecured loans during the whole year.

PROPORTION OF SECURED AND UNSECURED LOANS.





The percentage of unsecured loans among the Baiga is higher compared to the Plateau Zone which means that Baiga's credit is lower than of other aboriginals of his region. Therefore, in any future scheme of credit supply to the Baiga, insistance on security would be against the realities. Like the village moneylender the agency of organised credit will have to be content with the personal credit of the Baiga. The best method of securing loan in these circumstances would be to ensure its productive utilisation rather than try to cover it with any tangible property.

The percentage of secured loans varies from 1.9 in Kawardha area to 14 in the Mungeli tehsil. The most important factor which influences the percentage of secured loans is the practice generally adopted by the moneylender. Where a *Sahukar* has regular dealings with his debtor as in the case of Baihar area, he does not insist upon security except in the case of an habitual evader or a heavy loan. Baiga villages of Mungeli tehsil being located in inaccessible areas, the moneylender guards himself against the possibility of evasion by the highlander. Similarly. the Baiga villages of Dindori (12.07), like Piparia and Jalda Bona, are far away from through roads and render moneylending risky as well as costly. There is another factor which explains the low percentage of secured loans in inaccessible areas like the Baiga Chak (6.3), and Kawardha (1.9). Enquiries disclosed that majority of loan transactions was confined within the tribe in which loan on personal credit is the rule. The *Sahukar* does not consider it profitable or practicable to extend his business to areas where he cannot keep his grip on his debtors. Hence the low percentage of secured loans in the Baiga Chak and Kawardha tehsil. Regional variations indicate that degree of accessability of the area, regularity of contact between the Baiga and *Sahukar*, general practice in vogue and the number of loan transactions within the tribe affect the percentage of secured and unsecured loans in the Baiga region.

CREDIT AGENCIES

Mahajan

In an undeveloped area like the Baiga Region, the business of supplying credit is not so easy and free from risk as in the case of urban centres. Lack of communications, inaccessibility of hill or forest villages, and an altogether strange social environment prevent the ordinary indigenous banker or organised institutions from spreading money lending business into the interior. Only those persons who live either in the aboriginal village or near about, and who have an intimate knowledge of aboriginal life, take the risk of advancing loans to aboriginal people. However, during the last century the village moneylenders have penetrated into the inaccessible tracts and spread their business to a considerable extent. Investigations disclosed that nearly 58 per cent of loans were supplied by the mahajans. The name does not apply to the Vaish community alone. Mahajan is the universal name by which any person of substance, who does some grain or moneylending, is known, as such in the rural areas. He possesses an intimate knowledge of the character and credit of each of his clients. His loans are generally confined to residents of his village and its immediate neighbourhood. He charges high rate of interest to cover risks. The Mahajan also keeps a grocery or cloth shop, and often purchases the produce of small cultivators. However, in the Baiga villages, he seldom resides permanently. He visits at the time of harvest for recovering his loans. In recent years his contacts with the tribal tracts have increased due to the development of roads and footpaths. But there is not much change in the old practices and methods of the village moneylender. Inspite of the debt legislation, his fraudulent and evasive habits continue. He does not keep any regular accounts, nor does he grant any receipt for the repayment to his debtors. Although investigations did not bring out any case of dispute, of intimidation or use of force on the part of the *Sahukar*, the peaceful relations appear to be due more to Baiga's par excellence honesty and to his general ignorance of law and fear of the civilised, than mahajan's fair dealings.

Lending by Baigas

The second important agency which supplies loans to the Baiga tribe is Baiga himself. Nearly 18.9 per cent of credit is provided by Baigas themselves. The more resourceful Baiga spare usually their surplus grain to residents of their own village or immediate neighbourhood. A Baiga takes a loan from another Baiga either for consumption or seed or for the celebration of some social ceremony. The rates of interest are lower than that of the mahajan and the conditions of repayment are also not so harsh. Considerations of mutual-help and tribal ties influence the creditor. But in recent years a tendency has been noticed among the Baiga also to charge high rates of interest. Grain lending among Baigas is slowly becoming a source of income rather than an act of mutual aid. For example, Baigas charge practically the same rate of interest as the mahajan where grain has been lent on Badhi or Bijahi. But there are also cases of grain loans free of interest or charged at a very insignificant rate. Personal discussions with elderly Baigas revealed that they do not feel worried about the debt of a Baiga brother, for mutual adjustments are possible, and the debtor can repay a Baiga's debt in a number of ways—personal labour, forest products, help on social ceremonies, etc.

Gond moneylenders

Gonds are emerging as a vigorous credit agency in the tribal areas. Being regular and better cultivators they are generally more resourceful than the Baiga. Quite a large number of them cultivate money crops and are able to save some money at the harvest. They invest it in a profit-yielding moneylending business. As moneylenders Gonds have a distinct advantage over the Baiga as well as the Mahajan. They escape the bad name of a Mahajan, but command more resources than the Baiga. Being the resident of the Baiga village if the village is a mixed one, or living in the neighbourhood, Gond possesses an intimate knowledge of Baiga's financial circumstances. The Mahajan generally lives at a considerable distance and therefore he is not able to keep constant watch over his debtor. But Gond lives in close proximity of the Baiga and often guards his interests on the spot. He is a part of the village community, and yet he is under no obligation of observing Baigas' tribal customs and practices. He is as close as a neighbour for protecting his interests and as much away as the Mahajan in flouting humanitarian factors of tribal life. Besides, compared to a Baiga he is more shrewed, cunning, tricky and calculating in his dealings. There is no surprise therefore that nearly 17.9 per cent of the credit needs of the Baiga are now met by Gonds. At present there is no separate section of moneylenders among them, but if the trend continues it is probable that in course of time moneylending may become a whole time occupation for some of them.

Government Loans and Cooperative Societies

Neither the Government loan nor cooperative credit has become popular among the Baiga. Taccavi loans formed only 3.8 per cent of the debts borrowed by the tribe—and such loans were confined to the forest villages mainly. The reasons for the unpopularity of taccavi are not far to seek. The concept of external aid itself does not fit in primitive economy for since ages tribals have been living in self-sufficiency. Moreover, till recently officials visited these areas more to rule than to help. Help from a ruler is not easily understood by the Baiga. Apart from this, taccavi is given in money, and in lump sum ; while Baiga is habituated to draw upon a current account, (mostly grain) opened either with a Baiga or the Mahajan. Sometimes the amount of taccavi is inadequate and does not meet Baiga's requirements. Similarly its distribution through Government officials scares away the simple and the Raj-fearing Baiga. The conditions of repayment of loan are also very exacting for tribal, who is habituated to leniencies at the hands of Baiga creditor or Mahajan. Taccavi loans are granted for specific purposes to which a Baiga cannot stick for he is in the habit of using mahajan's advances as he likes. Generally a Mahajan does not worry whether his advances are put to productive or unproductive uses as long as he is sure of getting annual interest from the debtor. Mahajan also discourages Taccavi loans in the villages for they hit at his business. The Baiga therefore do not prefer taccavi for it may jeopardise the chances of getting a loan from the *Sahukar*. It may be noted here that at present taccavi loans form a very insignificant part of the total credit borrowed by the Baiga. Cooperative credit is practically unknown in the Baiga region surveyed. Some credit or multipurpose societies, no doubt, have been opened in the tribal tracts.* But most of them are in the comparatively more developed parts as will be seen from the following table :—

MULTIPURPOSE COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES WORKING IN BAIGA LAND

District	Tehsil	Place of Cooperative Society
Bilaspur	Kathghom	Pali
,,	,,	Rampur
,,	,,	Bijra
,,	Bilaspur	Sakola
,,	,,	Marwahi
,,	,,	Dhanpur
Balaghat	Baihar	Aurgaon
,,	,	Birsa
,,	,,	Bhimlat
,,	,,	Kumdehi
,,	,,	Garhi
Mandla	Mandla	Tatri
,,	Dindori	Bondar
,,	,,	Simaria
,,	Niwas	Hatitara

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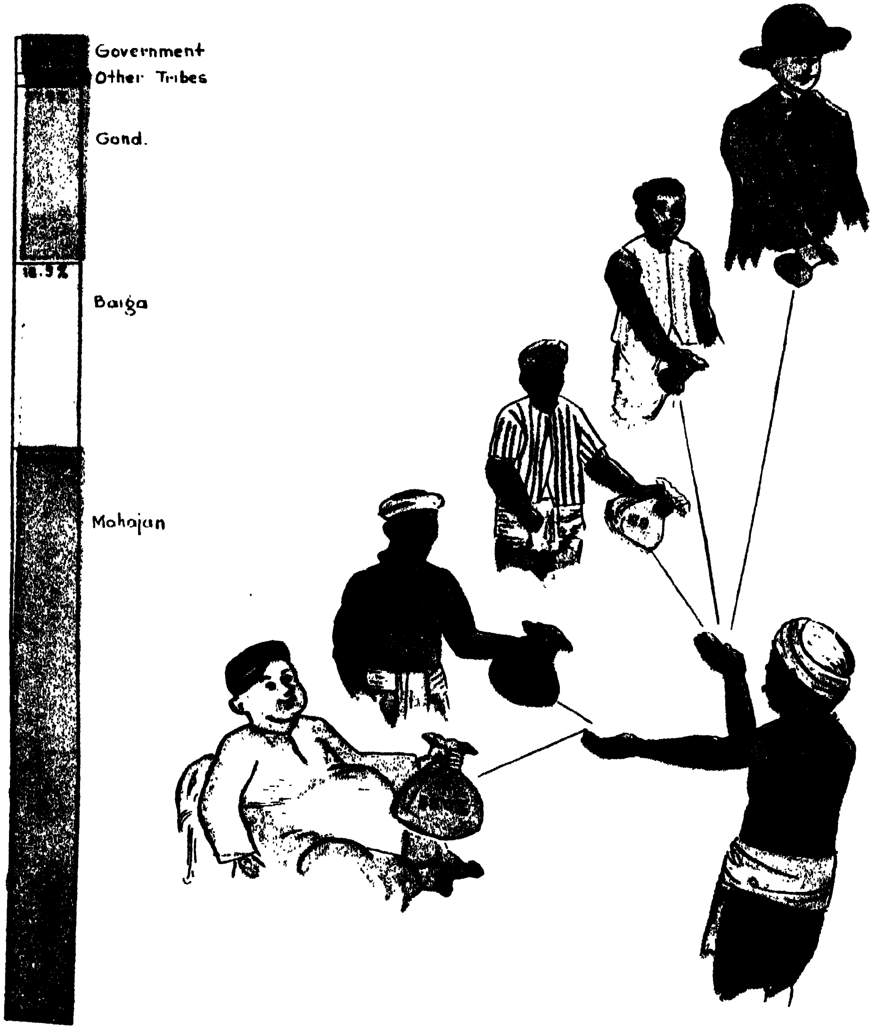
*See M.P. Government Publication, 'Andhkar Se Prakash Kee Aur', (1951), Pp. 62-64.

CREDIT AGENCIES OPERATING IN BAIGALAND.



They serve their own villages or at the most the population within a radius of 10 miles As will be seen from the table the number of cooperatives working in the tribal tracts is only 15. Their inadequacy becomes more clear when it is remembered that these fifteen small village societies serve a population of 2,920,636 spread over 6743 villages. As suppliers of consumers goods, thev have failed to carve any place for themselves in the tribal economy. A weekly market or a roaming pedler still commands the majority of the aboriginal population as its customers. Baigas live in the interior most and hidden places where cooperative movement has not reached as yet. In our survey of 350 Baiga families of all types of regions—the more developed like Baihar and the completely isolated like Baiga Chak—not a single case of a Baiga was found in which the creditor was a cooperative society. Thus cooperative credit at present does not occupy a place of any significance in the tribal credit system. In fact other tribes—other than Gond and Baiga, like Panka, Ahir and Agaria—do supply some credit to the Baiga—nearly 1.4 per cent. The table on the next page shows the relative position of different credit agencies operating in the Baiga region.

Interest

Ordinarily the rate of interest charged by the Mahajan, Gond and other classes of moneylenders varies between 25 and 100 per cent. The majority of loans is against personal security, owing to the fact that land is non-transferable and cannot be offered as security against loans. In the absence of any tangible security the rate of interest is bound to be high. The Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee remarked '85 per cent of the land held by cultivators in C P. is held in occupancy or ryotwari right, untransferable by sale or mortgage and non-attachable in satisfaction of debt. The occupancy tenants and ryots have, therefore, no credit beyond the value of their standing crops, their cattle, their movable property and their own personal honesty. With greater risks the interest rates are higher'.* Usually a rate of 50 per cent is charged on grain loans borrowed for consumption purposes, with the condition of repayment of the loan at the next harvest. If the debtor fails to repay at the stipulated time, the interest is included in the amount of the capital and interest is then calculated on the increased amount of capital. In certain cases the rate on such loans may go up to 75 per cent. Where the grain loan is borrowed for seed the rate is 100 per cent and the loan is repayable at the next harvest. On money loans, however, the rate of interest is lower, that is 37½ per cent normally. The rates are practically the same in all the districts surveyed.

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* **Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee Report (C.P. & Berar) Vol. I, p.121**

CREDIT AGENCIES IN BAIGA LAND
(Year 1951-52)

Region	Mahajan		Baiga		Gond		Other Tribes		Government		Cooperative		Other Agencies	
	Amount of debt	Percentage of total debt	Amount of debt	Percentage of total debt	Amount of debt	Percentage of total debt	Amount of debt	Percentage of total debt	Amount of debt	Percentage of total debt	Amount of debt	Percentage of total debt	Amount of debt	Percentage of total debt
	Rs. as.		Rs. as.		Rs. as.		Rs. as.		Rs. as.		Rs. as.		Rs. as.	
Baiga Chak	...	...	50 0	30.8	112 8	69.2	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Dindori	395 8	34.3	526 12	45.6	232 8	20.1	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Mandla	4,844 10	78	561 14	9.1	344 13	5.6	137 8	2.2	318 1	5.1	...	...	...	...
Mungeli	6 4	2.4	125 10	50	120 0	47.6	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Kawardha	37 8	7.7	388 2	78.4	62 6	13.9	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Baihar	351 2	24.2	191 4	13.1	861 0	59.3	...	...	50 2	3.4	...	...	...	...
Total for the Baiga land	5,635 0	58.0	1,843 10	18.9	1,740 3	17.9	137 8	2.2	368 3	3.8	...	...	...	...

Badhi System

As we have seen earlier, grain is still an important medium of exchange in the Baiga area. Unless circumstances compel them, Baigas prefer transactions in grain. The system of lending grain at 50 per cent interest is known as Badhi. When a Baiga's stock of grain runs short, he borrows grain either from his tribesmen or from the Mahajan to catch the next harvest. He gets such grain on the stipulated condition that it will be returned at the next harvest. Though the interest rates vary from 25 to 100 per cent in the State, in the Baiga area the Badhi rate is uniform, that is 50 per cent. In some places near the market centres 25 per cent is charged for wheat and gram, 50 per cent for rice and 100 per cent for *til* and other oil seeds. It is customary to charge a higher rate than the usual Badhi from a new client, the first time he borrows. But such cases are very few, for the Baiga know each other well and members of other tribes, too, are acquainted with the residents of neighbouring villages. As far as possible Baigas try to confine Badhi loan to themselves. Therefore, certain distinct advantages are claimed for the system. Grain loans solve the food problem of nearly 60 to 70 per cent Baiga families during the rainy season when there is a general scarcity of foodgrains and markets become inaccessible. Without any external help it enables them to tide over the period of seasonal crisis. Those who are in the habit of lending Badhi loans usually reserve grain in advance and thus learn to save. If the stock is not lent out, it is used by the family. The system encourages thrift and also creates a basis for credit. Indirectly it developes a cooperative spirit among the aboriginals, for the borrower (though no longer under the obligation of the creditor after repaying the loan) is always ready to help the creditor if some calamity overtakes the latter. Besides, the conditions for the repayment of grain loans are not very strict, particularly amongst Baigas. If the debtor has not reaped a good harvest, he is allowed to repay the Badhi grain at his convenience. The creditor is not hard upon his debtor, knowing that the grain was borrowed for feeding the hungry. Thus humanitarian considerations overpower the economic motive of recovering the loan. Against these advantages, however, we may balance certain drawbacks of the system. In ultimate analysis Badhi is a debt, and like all other debts the borrower has to pay a high rate of interest—50 per cent. Where the creditor happens to be a Mahajan or *teli* he is as strict in recovering the grain loan as in the case of money loans. He may insist on repayment in cash, in which case he charges 5 seer grain per rupee in addition to 50 per cent grain interest on the capital. The borrower of Badhi loses his social prestige for he is considered incapable of supporting even his own family. If on the one hand, Badhi enables the Baiga to tide over the rainy day, on the other hand it is responsible for causing shortage of foodgrains as the borrower has to part with considerable quantity of grain just after the harvest. On the whole the system has its root in the indigenous customs. It obviates money transactions which are more exacting for aboriginals. Confined within the tribals, the system is subject to all the regulatory customs and prestige factors prevalent among the Baiga. It was noted in certain cases that if the quantity of grain was not very large, the Baiga creditor might lend grain free of interest. If the exotic influence on interest rate, harsh conditions of repayment and the surcharge of 5 seers per rupee are removed the Badhi system can provide a basis for co-operative credit effecting transactions mainly in grain.

Bijahi System

Another system of grain loans of very ancient origin is known as Bijahi. Under Bijahi a grain loan is advanced for seeds at the time of sowing season at the rate of 100 per cent. The cultivator may need seeds due to poor or defective crop of the previous year, or thriftless use of grain or over-consumption on social ceremonies. The explanation of the high rate of interest lies in the fact that when seed loan is advanced the prices of grains are higher than at harvest. The system takes another form known as Bijaadhiya according to which half of the harvest is shared by the lender of seeds. The system solves the problem of supply of seeds locally. It encourages people to put aside a certain portion of their total yield for seed purposes and thus develops foresightedness among the aboriginals. Baigas try to avoid Bijahi as far as possible for the rate of interest is beyond their repaying capacity. A survey of 350 Baiga families disclosed that only 16.38 per cent loans were borrowed for seeds and nearly 80 per cent of these loans were taccavi loans for seeds. During friendly conversation with the Baiga, it was found that there was a practice of advancing seeds free of interest if the lender had enough stock for the rainy season.

Some more facts about the rate of interest in the Baiga region are worth noting. Usually the moneylender does not change interest rate on grounds of security offered by the borrower. Irrespective of the absence of security or its nature or the amount, his rates are traditionally uniform. Nor are the rates influenced by the purpose of loan except in case of Badhi and Bijahi. The lender does not make any difference between productive and unproductive loans while fixing the rate of interest. Also there is no variation in the rates on small loans and on big loans. In fact. small loans lead to the opening of a current account on which the incidence of interest is higher, as the repayments are not entered regularly and often the mahajan charges interest even on repayments. A borrower indebted to only one moneylender is charged lower rates than one who is a client of two or more than two mahajans.

The incidence of interest per rupee of debt shown in the following table proves that the interest rates are sufficiently high in this tract :—

INCIDENCE OF INTEREST PER RUPEE OF DEBT

Region	Incidence
	Rs. as. ps.
Baiga Chak	0 4 5
Dindori	0 4 9
Mandla	0 4 7
Mungeli	0 4 10
Kawardha	0 4 9
Baihar	0 6 1
For the whole Baiga land	0 4 10

DEBT LEGISLATION

An examination of the effects of indebtedness on aboriginals clearly proves the need of protective measures to save the aboriginal from the abyss of debt. Like other States, debt legislation in Madhya Pradesh was enacted in the wake of the General Depression of 1929. A series of acts was passed starting with the Debt Conciliation Act, 1933 (which was subsequently amended seven times up to 1937). In 1934 two more Acts were passed known as the Central Provinces Usurious Loans (Amendment) Act and the Central Provinces Money-lenders Act, requiring registration of moneylenders and to extend operation to mortgages in pending appeals. The Act was amended thrice – 1936. 1937 and 1940—and made it compulsory for moneylenders to get themselves registered, without which their suits for recovery of loans could not be taken up by the Courts. In 1937 came the Central Provinces Debtor's Protection Act, to provide for the protection of debtors from molestation and intimidation by their creditors. Finally in 1939 a more drastic and effective legislation known as the Central Provinces and Berar Relief of Indebtedness Act was enacted (later on amended thrice). It was intended to be an improvement on the Debt Conciliation Act .of

1933, and replaced Conciliation Boards by Debt Relief Courts presided over by Civil Judges. It aimed at helping agriculturist debtors whose debts did not exceed Rs. 25,000. The Act was to remain in force for three years from July 18th, 1939. It is not possible to discuss the provisions of all these Acts in this Chapter. The debt legislation enforced during 1934-1940 aimed at :—

(a) Reduction of debt through Debt Conciliation Boards or Debt Relief Courts.

(b) Regulation of rates of interest and control of usury.

(c) Licensing of moneylenders.

(d) Protection of debtors against molestation or intimidation by moneylenders or their agents.

(e) Moratorium on debt suits pending before the Courts.

(f) Regulation of accounts of moneylenders.

Most of these protective measures were taken to provide relief to the rural population which had suffered heavy losses during the period of general economic depression of 1929-34. None of these Acts, it must be remembered, was intended to solve the problem of aboriginal debt nor the special conditions of aboriginal tracts nor was the peculiarity of aboriginal indebtedness surveyed or taken into consideration while enacting the debt legislation in this State. However, most of the provisions of all the Acts were made applicable to the aboriginal areas as well, and some attempts were also made to provide relief to the indebted primitives in certain areas. It is, therefore, essential to examine the working of these Acts and how they affected the problem of aboriginal indebtedness. For any protective or relief measures in future must be based upon the experience of the past legislation.

Debt Conciliation Boards in tribal tracts

Debt Conciliation Boards were established and worked in all the tehsils of the State except the Mahasamund tehsil of Raipur and the Dindori and Niwas tehsils of Mandla District. The latter two tehsils contain nearly half the total Baiga population of the State. The Boards did some work in the Mandla tehsil and Baihar tehsil of Balaghat district. But here, too, very little success was achieved by them in providing relief to the aboriginal population. An enquiry made by Grigson revealed that under the Mandla Board only 334 aboriginal debtors had got their debts conciliated—the debt amounted to Rs. 3,76,428. The final report on the working of the Board commented on the very little use made of it by aboriginals, and suggested that the general ignorance of the Gond agriculturist led him to ignore the Board.

It is notable that in this area practically no application came from the Baiga tribe.* The position was in no way better in the Baihar tehsil of the Balaghat District where Baigas are concentrated. In all 166 applications were received by the Board between 1934-37. But since the lowest limit fixed for conciliation was a debt of Rs 150, the tribal population could get very little relief in Baihar tehsil as this limit was too high for its primitive population. Of the 166 applications 106 were for debts of over Rs. 200. Appraising the amount of relief received by the aboriginals of this area Grigson remarked, 'It is, however, fairly clear that in Baihar the aboriginal received practically no help from the Debt Conciliation Act'.† In Drug district also 'only a handful of aboriginal came before any of the Boards'. We have already seen that in the Mandla, Dindori, Niwas and Baihar tehsils where nearly three-fourths of the Baiga population resides, Baiga was practically untouched by the Debt Conciliation Act and in other tehsils too, the Baiga tribe did not receive relief of any magnitude. It will not be out of place to mention that when Gonds who are more advanced than the Baiga, have not received any substantial relief in their debt through the agency of Boards, it is too much to expect a Baiga to have got benefits of the legislation for he is a dweller of forests and hill tops away from the thorough routes of culture and civilisation.

Debt Relief Courts

The C.P. & Berar Relief of Indebtedness Act (1939) made provision for compulsory scaling down of debts and created Debt Relief Courts in place of the Debt Conciliation Boards. The Act provided for grant of graded relief according to a prescribed schedule. The payment of interest was limited to 4½ per cent compound interest with yearly rests, or 6 per cent simple interest on secured loans and 9 per cent on unsecured loans. During the first year of the enforcement of the Act, only three aboriginals in the Mandla district, six in the Balaghat district and four in the Drug district had applied for relief. The typical case of the Baihar tehsil throws enough light on the working of these Relief Courts in the aborigihal areas. 'No Gond with whom I discussed debt in Baihar had heared of the Debt Relief Court; as it is far away in Balaghat. I doubt if the average aboriginal from Baihar tehsil would make use of it even if he knew of it'. ‡ Those who presided over the Courts were of the opinion that very little could be done for the aboriginal debtor, for the aboriginal can never produce documents or disprove the creditors' account of the original transaction. Personal visits to over 350 families of the tribal tracts of the Mandla, Balaghat, Bilaspur and Drug district did not bring a single case of any Baiga who had received relief from the Debt Relief Courts. Like the Debt Conciliation Board, the Debt Relief Courts had also failed in solving the problem of aboriginal debt.

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* The Aboriginal Problem in C.P. & Berar (1944) by Grigson p. 198.

† Grigson : Preliminary Report on the Aboriginal Problem in the Balaghat District (1941) p. 50.

‡ Grigson : The Aboriginal Problem in the Balaghat District, p. 50.

Licensing of moneylenders

The Central Provinces Moneylenders Act, 1934 provided for the registration of moneylenders in the district in which they practise on payment of annual fees. It was also enacted that no suit for recovery of a loan advanced by a moneylender may proceed until the court were satisfied that he held a valid registration certificate. Opinion is divided about the success of this legislation. Some opine that it has proved completely futile and has only brought income to the provincial treasury. Others express doubt about the scope and efficacy of the Act. Grigson's enquiry had revealed that the registration of moneylenders was inadequate. In Mandla, Dindori and Newas tehsils the work of registration was not at all satisfactory.* The general concensus of opinion is that the Act does not adequately protect the aboriginals or low caste debtors. Malpractices are still rampant among the moneylenders. The *Sahukars* are in the habit of showing in the document covering the loan an amount greater than that actually lent. The rates of interest are not only high, but they encourage the Mahajan to use unfair methods of dealing with aboriginal debtors. Under the Badhi and Bijahi systems still the rates are 50 per cent and 100 per cent. Since the punishment for violation of the provisions of the Act is very negligible—a fine of Rs. 50 Mahajans do not care for the Act. Nor are they anxious to take the help of Courts for recovering their loans—the right denied to them if they do not observe the provisions of the Act—because they find themselves strong enough otherwise to recover the loans from the aboriginals.

The Debtor's Protection Act, 1937 makes the molestation of a debtor for the recovery of debt a cognizable offence, punishable with three month's simple imprisonment or Rs. 500 fine or both. One extreme view regarding the Act is that 'it exists only on paper and that molestation goes on merrily not only in rural areas but in towns' too. Whenever the Act has done some good to the debtors it has also infuriated the creditors, who at once sought revenge by filing recovery suits in the Civil Courts. However, during the investigation not a single Baiga complained about molestation or intimidation by the moneylenders. But on a closer examination it was found there was also no intention of evading the debt on the part of the Baiga. Absence of molestation is not so much due to the existance of the Act or fair-mindedness of the *Sahukar* but due to Baiga's high sense of honour of repayment of his debts, and his complete surrender to the Mahajan on whom he depends in periods of crisis.

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* See Notes on the Aboriginal Problem in Mandla District, p. 8.

Causes of poor success

Before making any proposals for the improvement of existing legislation or evolving any special machinery for the Baiga, it is essential to examine briefly the main causes of poor success of the debt legislation in the tribal areas. The aboriginal's attitude towards debt legislation itself, it was found, is one of the biggest hindrance in the way. Baiga's high sense of honour over repayment induces him to believe that it is morally wrong to apply for a third party's help against the wishes of his creditor for reducing his debt. The idea of getting his debts written off does not seem to appeal to him. He appears to be mentally chained down to his debt and his creditor. This is partly due to the influence of tribal loyalties, partly to a moral sense and partly due to his economic dependence upon the Mahajan. Baiga's ignorance of protective measures is also responsible for this state of affairs. Very little publicity has been given to debt legislation in the Baiga region and whenever some efforts had been made they were unplanned, ineffective and inadequate. Besides this general ignorance certain economic and social factors have also obstructed the working of legislation. Debt Conciliation Boards or Relief Courts had their headquarters far away from the Baiga villages. It has always been a problem for the Baiga to go over that distance and made their way in a strange place. Personal appearance before the Board involved expenditure and loss of work on farm or forest for which an average Baiga who is on the starvation line is seldom prepared. Moreover, he knows that in the absence of any alternative source of credit, it is not wise to antagonise the Mahajan by making recourse to a third agency against him. Then a Baiga has no conclusive evidence to disprove his creditors' accounts nor can he manage for any legal advice. The existing legislation expects the ignorant, illiterate, poor and shy Baiga to take the initiative in applying for relief ; the onus of proving his debt or interest charges as excessive is upon him. Again, it has been left to him to disprove the validity of his creditor's accounts. The aboriginal debtor cannot prove any of the above and can always be made at any time to put his thumb mark on any kind of document without knowing its contents.

Special protective and relief measures

The foregoing examination of the working of debt legislation shows that the existing protective measures have not proved effective in reducing the volume of aboriginal indebtedness; they have merely existed on paper, while the moneylender still enjoys the upperhand. The situation clearly establishes the need of some special measures to control the spreading evil. Most of the existing Acts were enacted with a view to provide relief to the rural population who suffered heavily during the 1929 Depression. They were never meant to help the indebted aboriginal. There are certain peculiarities of the aboriginal's problem. The aboriginal is passing through the process of culture transition. The section into which he is slowly merging is stronger than his own. The aboriginal has no economic footing of his own. His unregulated acculturisation has exposed him to the forces of modern economy over which he has very little control. Credit situations of the tribal areas on the other hand warrant measured steps for regulating the business of moneylending. The mahajan is virtually in a monopolistic position. Any measure of reform should be two pronged—it should break the monopoly of the mahajan by developing an alternative agency of credit, and secondly, remove the tribal's economic helplessness. Regulatory measures must also be cautious in converting the existing kind economy into a money economy. As the investigations show, credit transactions based on mutual aid are still prevalent among the Baiga. As long as Baiga's present economy survives (and it will take a long time before it enters a new phase), such transactions will serve a very useful purpose of saving aboriginals from the rapacious mahajan. Efforts should be made to revive and strengthen the Baiga system of credit. Attempt should be made to mould it into co-operative credit rather than throw it to the wind in the wake of transition. Lack of means of communication in tribal areas produces adverse effects on the supply of credit and renders the enforcement of debt legislation difficult. Undeveloped communications reduce the credit facilities, and also put the mahajan into a 'safety island' not easily accessible to other agencies. Any measure of relief instead of asking a Baiga to come from a distant place for getting relief, should take relief to his doors. That the aboriginal population—particularly the backward Baigas among them—must be protected through special legislation has been recognised by eminent authorities. The Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee emphasised on such measures as far back as 1929 in the following words, 'The case of the more backward tracts, particularly of the ryotwari areas and villages with poor communications requires special consideration in the more backward tracts, where Gond aborigines predominate, and particularly in the ryotwari villages, wherein the ryots, through the absence of any rights of transfer in their land, have very little credit, some special financial facilities appear to be necessary. We have noted that in these backward tracts those who borrow money are required ordinarily to pay a very high rate of interest, which often approximates 37½ per cent or even more."* The need of special measures for backward areas, in principle, was also recognised by the Agricultural Finance Sub-Committee, 1945.† D. Symington who surveyed the problem of aboriginal debt in the State of Bombay, laid special emphasis on enacting new debt legislation for the aboriginal tract.‡ ('I consider it necessary to adopt special measures to regulate the moneylending profession in the partially Excluded Areas, and 'I must strongly emphasize that if these measures are to have any hope of success it is essential for them to be of such a drastic and sweeping nature that evasion will be impossible'). In Madhya Pradesh W.V. Grigson who toured practically all the tribal tracts as special officer to enquire into the problems of aboriginals wrote that protection measures were necessary and that it was not safe any longer to leave the aboriginal at the mercy of the exploiter'. Verrier Elwin, who has spent nearly 25 years among the Gonds and Baigas writes 'the scores of vagabond adventures that wander through the country exploiting the people should be removed, and others licensed only on condition of their behaving properly towards the aboriginals'.**

Special Licence

Since the majority of the Baiga is on the starvation line and nearly 58 per cent of them owe a debt to the mahajan, special protective measures are necessary to save them from exploitation by mahajans and *Sahukars*. Only those persons who hold special licence for dealing with aboriginals, in addition to the certificate under Moneylender's Act, be permitted to do moneylending business in the predominantly aboriginal tracts. The special licences should be obligatory not only for the moneylenders of the Scheduled areas, but also for those who live outside such areas but deal with Scheduled tribes living in the Scheduled areas. If administrative circumstances permit, the system of special licence should be extended further so as to cover some more areas. Since some persons of scheduled tribes also carry on moneylending like mahajans—nearly 19 per cent loans among Baigas were advanced by Gonds and other tribes—they should also be required by law to take out a special licence like the ordinary moneylender. In order to eliminate unscrupulous elements and confirmed 'bad characters' from money lending business it is essential that special licences should be issued by the District Magistrate: or any other responsible official like the Tribal Welfare Officer after satisfying himself as to the good character and financial stability of the grantee. A thorough enquiry into his past dealings and sources of earning should precede before the special licence is issued to him. Tribal opinion should also be ascertained regarding the standard of honesty of the would be licencee. But at the same time every possible care should be taken that no genuine and honest moneylender is denied the right of lending money due to malafide enquiry, as such exclusion will adversely affect the already limited credit facilities in the tribal areas. Moneylending in scheduled areas without obtaining a special licence should be made a penal offence, punishable with imprisonment as well as fine. Transactions of loan in kind or money without a prescribed licence should be declared non-enforceable at law. And in the case of breach of any rule made under the system, licences should be forfeited. Under the special measure, rules should prescribe the form in which the account should be kept, compulsory periodical issue of Statement of Account to debtors, employment of persons as moneylender's agents and penalties for non-compliance of rules. Since crop is the only means of sustenance for an aboriginal family exemption from attachment of his grain stock necessary for the maintenance of family in execution of a Civil Court's decree, is suggested. A scale of such exemptions should be prescribed by the law, based on the size and nature of holdings and the size of the family.

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* Report of the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, (C.P. & Berar) Vol. I Pp, 155-56.

Report of the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, (C.P. & Berar) Vol. II, Pp. 702-21.

† Report of the Agricultural Finance Sub-Committee, Pp. 72-73.

‡ Report on the Aboriginal and Hill Tribes of the Partially Excluded Areas in the Bombay Presidency (1938), Pp. 11-16.

** Verrier Elwin : The Baiga, p. 515.

In addition to the protection granted to the debtor under the C.P. & Berar Protection of Debtor' Act IV, 1937 further legal measures are necessary to make the debtor's position more safe. Clause (g) in Section 2 (vii) of the Moneylender's Act excludes 'a loan advanced to an agricultural labourer by his employer' from the definition of loan and thus exempts the malguzars or for that big cultivators from licence. This gap enables many moneylenders to evade registration. It is common practice that many aboriginals are engaged as farm workers and in their case it is difficult to find out whether they are debtors or servants of the employer. Therefore it would be desirable to insist on the registration as moneylenders of those who habitually engage their labour in this way. Again Section 13 of the Act exempts from its provision 'a proprietor who advances grain or money exclusively to any of his tenants for seed, land improvement or agricultural operations'. Innumerable examples can be cited in which the malguzars (till the abolition of malguzari) gave loans for these purposes and caught aboriginals into their grips.

In future legislations such exemptions should not be permitted, and even loans for seed or agricultural operations should be brought within the definition of ordinary loans. It should be made essential for the carting contractors and forest labour contractors to obtain special licences for operating in tribal areas. Many carting contractors grant advances to aboriginals on usurious terms and make their debtors almost their bond servants. Similarly, forest contractors and other contractors give advances to aboriginals on certain conditions which ultimately result in pushing the latter into heavy debt. If some practical difficulties are found in prescribing compulsory licence for this class, officials of the Forest Department should be given specific instructions for rooting out the evil practices.

An analysis of the distribution of debt burden shows that nearly 46 per cent of Baigas owe a debt of over Rs. 40. In view of Baiga's average income, his economic handicaps and the low rate of saving, it seems this section will not be able to repay their debt in near future and they are likely to continue in debt for long. Even the past debt legislation has failed to relieve the burden of indebtedness. It, therefore, appears to be unavoidable to have recourse to methods of debt composition. The broad outlines of a scheme of debt composition and an aboriginal insolvency legislation are discussed under 'Rehabilitation of Baiga Economy'.

CHAPTER XIII

TRANSFORMATION OF BAIGA ECONOMY

In preceding chapters we have reviewed Baiga's economic life. The Baiga economy is undergoing a transformation of fundamental nature. The old order is giving place to the new. This has given jerks and jolts to the tribal order. Before we suggest any plan for the rehabilitation of the tribe, it is essential to study the process of transformation and its effects upon the Baiga economy.

The old economy was based on self-sufficiency. The tribesmen collected or produced their food themselves. Their cloth requirements were extremely scanty and they got them in exchange of forest produce from the local weaver known as Panka. Being a nomadic tribe, the Baiga did not construct permanent homes. Small cottages of grass and wood met their needs fully. In olden days gourd-bottles and leaf-plates surved the purpose of utensils. Cooking earthen pots were bought in the weekly market, where the local potter came for selling his wares. But salt was an important article of consumption which established a regular link with the outside world. Baigas took their forest produce to nearby markets and exchanged it with salt. They had scarcely any idea, as Forsyth observed about eighty years ago, of the use of coin money, the rare rupees that reached them were pierced and worn as ornaments by the woman.* The hill-men were primarily food-gatherers and hunters and did not collect wild food more than what they needed for themselves. However, for salt and cloth they collected some forest produce; but even this exchange was very much restricted, both in volume and the medium. Barter was the rule and money an exception in the old Baiga economy. Wage system (even in kind) was almost unknown in the Baiga region where commercial exploitation of forests had not started. To summarise the distinctive features of the old system : Baiga lived a life of self-sufficiency and economic isolation, their contact with the outside world through markets was of a casual nature ; money as a medium of exchange was almost unknown and most of the transactions were either on the basis of reciprocity or barter ; the system of hired labour and wage payment was not prevalent in the interior parts of forests where Baigas usually lived.

But the old economic order has undergone radical changes since 1867 when axe-cultivation was completely stopped by a Government

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Forsyth : Op. Cit., p. 360.

fiat. The nomadic Baiga has become a settled cultivator. He has adopted new technique of production. Major part of the Baiga region has been opened up by means of communication and transport. The Forest Department and contractors are carrying out their operations in remote corners of forests. Modern administration has spread its tentacles far and wide. The village moneylender and petty traders are now carrying their trade regularly in the tribal areas. Baigas now produce not only foodgrains for domestic consumption. but also commercial crops for the distant markets. The nature and method of their exchange transactions have changed considerably. Money and wage system now play important role in their daily life. The economic transformation has created new problems and offers new opportunities to the tribe. It is extremely interesting to examine the impact of these changes on the tribal economy of the Baiga.

Effects of change-over to plough cultivation

The change-over to plough cultivation is the most forceful factor, which breached the ramparts of Baiga's self-sufficiency and economic isolation. It has converted Baiga's food-gathering economy into a regular farm economy. Today the Baiga are not shifting cultivators. They have settled down in small villages and carry on plough agriculture, like the ordinary farmer. Axe cultivation permitted him sufficient time to collect wild roots and hunt animals. Shifting cultivation and food gathering were harmoniously balanced. He was not then primarily an agriculturist. But weaning from the axe has reduced him to the position of a farmer of staple foodgrains. As a result a Baiga now largely depends upon his farm produce which, as we have seen earlier. is highly precarious due to poor lands, primitive technique and absence of measures to minimise the effects of adverse natural factors. A bad crop now immediately creates conditions of scarcity and exposes him to the dangers of famine, for at present he depends more upon farm product and less and less on wild roots and animal food. Under changed conditions the fear of food shortage has become Baiga's constant worry. It has driven him out of his grove and compelled him to seek employment in forest and road work, and earn means for purchasing foodgrains. This in its turn further makes him dependent on non-agricultural occupations as forest work interferes with his agricultural operations. He falls into a vicious circle—the more he works in forest and road schemes, the greater is his dependence on them and the less is the crop production. Now he has to strive to meet his primary needs through exchange economy.

The change in the system of cultivation and the consequent advent of exchange economy has on the one hand created new difficulties and problems for the Baiga, and on the other it has opened new economic prospects for future progress. The Baiga being a tribe of axe-cultivators and nomads have no traditions of plough cultivation. They have poor experience of the plough technique. A sudden switch-over to the plough pushed them into a situation in which they find themselves very much handicapped. People subsisting on food gathering are not in the habit of accumulating wealth because they live a tree to mouth economy. But the plough-cultivator needs a minimum amount of capital in the form of bullocks, plough and seeds which the Baiga could not assemble by themselves. In the absence of adequate resources and the knowledge of new technique of cultivation, the aboriginal could hardly stand in competition against the cultivator of plains who had inherited centuries old experience and traditions of plough-farming. It is, therefore, no surprise that prohibition of *bewar* led to migrations of entire Baiga villages, adoption and again abandonment of plough and hectic changes of places and occupations. For several decades Baigas were faced with economic chaos,—the officials forcing the forest tribe to take to plough, while the latter resisting this imposition through migrations and secret forest fellings. The new situation had disastrous effects upon the tribe. The Baiga lost self-confidence and enterprising spirit in their traditional economic pursuits; nor could they carve a place for themselves in the farm economy. The tribe has consequently developed a fatalistic outlook and defeatist tendencies in its social life. "Baigas who have taken to plough," as Elwin has observed, "are servile, obsequious, timid, of poor physique, their tribal life is all to pieces."*

The agricultural practices of the Baiga were a deftly interknit pattern of magic, religion and economics. Success in agriculture depended not only on the proper distribution of the means of production, on the harmonious relations subsisting between the agriculturist and nature powers, spirits and gods believed to preside over its different stages, but on innumerable beliefs and customs, positive and negative, which circumscribe the activities of the farmer yet secured his crops and increased his yield.**. After selecting a suitable site for the *bewar* the Baiga used to take some rice and throw it over a tree in the middle of the *bewar* and fell it with a single stroke of the axe. The head of the family would take a leaf from the tree, fold it in four and tie it on the standing stool signifying his occupation of the site. Fifteen days after the clearing of the brushwood Baigas worshipped their axes promising *Kutki dai* or *Anna dai* that if the crops were good, they would make special offerings at harvest time. They invoked the Nanga Baiga and Nanga Baigin through their *mantras* recited over the axes. Before actual felling, they offered a coconut to the jungle-dwellers whose home they destroyed. After the first rainfall, they observed a variation of the Bidri ceremony, offering special gifts to *Dharati Mata* (Mother Earth). At the harvest time, they made small imitation threshing floor for *Thakur Deo*, and offered to him and *Annadai*, the first fruits of the crop. It was vital to perform these ceremonies, for it was firmly believed by the Baiga that tigers devoured those who failed to do so.*

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* Elwin : The Baiga p 514 : Loss of Nerve p. 16.

Dr. F. Haimendorf relates the same experience about the Reddis of Hyderabad. "Wherever I stayed in a hill-village, it struck me that the Reddis persisting in their old life as shifting cultivators and food-gatherers seemed on the whole both healthier and happier than those who lived in the open country in symbiosis with Hindu castes or were settled on the Godavari banks and engaged in forest labour".
"The Reddis of Bison Hills" p. 306.

** See D.N. Mazumdar : 'The Fortunes of Primitive Tribes' p, 222.

With the stoppage of *bewar* these rituals and ceremonies have lost their significance for the Baiga. His faith in them has declined and the system of cultivation based on magico-social beliefs and the operation of natural forces has collapsed. The Gunia and elders whose advice in the selection of *bewar* sites and guidance in the observance of rituals protected the destinies of Baiga villagers, have lost their hold and force in the present day Baiga economy. Yet no substitute to it has been found as very few Baiga have inherited any traditional skill of plough cultivation. Even the co-operative element which combined the aboriginals in their primitive agriculture to some degree has disappeared. Baigas selected their *bewar* plots in the neighbourhood and assisted one another in heavy operations. But now plough cultivation compels them to search plots on individual basis because long patches of level and fertile lands are not easily available at one site in the hilly country. Baiga fields are scattered over a wide area making co-operation in agricultural activities almost impossible. The individual farmer is now worried more about his own fields than his help to the tribesmen. The forces of cohesion namely elder's leadership and common location of plots have disappeared from Baiga agriculture and they have not been replaced by the modern system of co-operative farming. The present day tribal agriculture is thus functioning in a vacuumtorn from its past without being linked with the future.

Change over to plough cultivation is also responsible for causing a vital change in the composition of Baiga diet. Formerly Baigas carried on shifting cultivation as a secondary occupation just to meet their foodgrain requirements. Major part of their time was spent in gathering wild roots and hunting game. Therefore, Baiga diet consisted of coarse foodgrains adequately balanced with roots and leafy vegetables and meat and fish. But after the adoption of plough cultivation which requires greater attention and time, Baigas do not have enough time for going to the forest. The game laws have also imposed various restrictions on their hunting and fishing activities. Personal discussions with the Baiga revealed that they did not get meat diet even twice a month. And even the proportion of wild roots and tubers in their diet is declining because the women who formerly collected forest produce are now engaged in their spare time in helping their menfolk on the farm or collecting forest produce of commercial value. Consequently aboriginal diet is fast becoming a predominantly cereal diet. It is difficult to make a scientific appraisal of this change as the nutritional surveys of tribal diet of the two phases are not available. However, the Baiga in their personal talks affirmed that their elders who ate older type of food were more sturdy and healthy. Visits to the villages showed that where the people collected wild roots and leafy vegetables and some how managed for meat, had better standard of health than those who lived in mixed villages and had adopted new way of living. The Baiga villages near the Dindori-Gorakhpur road and those of Piparia and Jalda Bona show this difference distinctively. The difference becomes still more marked when the Baiga diet of Ladra (Pandaria Zamindari), a village in the interior, is compared with the Baiga diet of Mukki in Baihar tehsil. The diet in the former is extremely varied with flesh of animals from rat to the sambhar, and with a great number of forest fruits, roots and tubers, while the latter's diet is badly deficient in these articles.*

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* For a detailed description of Baiga's agricultural ceremonies see Elwin's 'The Baiga' (Pp 108—110) and Indarjit Singh's 'The Gondwana and the Gond' (Pp. 148—152.)

The change in agricultural system is reflected not only in Baiga's diet, but it has also affected the sex division of labour. Under the old Bewar system hunting was a monopoly of the male. In other activities women worked side by side with men. Except in heavy or dangerous work like felling of trees, hunting or climbing of trees for robbing beehives, the woman was man's constant companion. Both men and women went to the forest for collecting fruits, roots and tubers. But the plough cultivation has disturbed this arrangement. Men are now busy in agricultural operations which have a break of hardly two to three months in a year. They have, as a result, no time for going to the forest. Thus the work of collecting forest produce for domestic consumption, is largely left to the womenfolk. With the additional burden of domestic duties, they are unable to assist their menfolk in cultivation work to the extent to which they did before. Farming has, therefore, become the main work of the latter. As the number of exchange transactions has increased (reasons discussed before) in the Baiga economy, it is mainly men who go to the village markets for buying or selling commodities or deal with outsiders. Since such transactions were very few in the past there was no special sphere for the males. In the field of liquor distilling, too, there is a change. Under the old order when home-distilling was permitted, both men and women participated in the distilling process. But with the suppression of home-distilling, the household industry has disappeared. Whenever liquor is required, it is the man who goes to the liquor shop often situated at a distant place. Even in illicit distillation men do the job, for the work has to be done in inaccessible places in a secret manner.

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* Elwin : 'Loss of Nerve' p. 18 and p. 44.
Shamrao Hivale and Dr. Akroyd quoted by Grigson in his Report on the Aboriginal Problem in C.P. & Berar p. 301.

But the most significant change brought about by plough-cultivation is Baiga's new economic responsibilities as a regular cultivator. The modern Baiga being an occupant cultivator has to pay a fixed amount of land revenue in cash periodically. Other taxes like *chari* (grazing tax) and *nistar* (tax for using forest produce for domestic purposes) are also paid in cash. At times he has to arrange for cash for buying seeds and bullocks and other agricultural implements. The poor aboriginal who formerly subsisted on food-gathering and shifting cultivation finds himself faced these days with a difficult problem, namely how to meet increased cash liabilities. He has come out of the economic isolation and abondoned his self-sufficiency in order to meet the new situation. Formerly Baigas produced only as much foodgrain as they required for their family. Cultivation of commercial crops like oil seeds and wheat, was practically unknown. Forest products were mainly collected for domestic needs. But now increasing cash requirements compelled Baigas to introduce various changes in their economy. In order to enhance his money income, every Baiga now tries to produce not only what he needs for himself but also to sell some quantity in the market or to repay by way of debt, to the *Sahukar*. The effort is extended further—most of the Baiga now cultivate *rai* (oil seed), wheat and rice wherever geographical conditions permit. Thus Baiga's Bewar which was formerly filling the cooking pot has been converted into a plough farm and linked with the markets. Baigas, living in as remote villages as Jhilan in Dindori tehsil and Ladra in Mungeli tehsil, go to the markets of Bajag and Gopalpur, respectively, for selling their farm produce. Most of the Baiga villages of Bahar tehsil are now directly linked with village markets through roads. Baiga agriculture is thus on the way of commercialisation.

The necessity of earning more cash income has compelled the Baiga to change the purpose of collecting forest produce. Formerly

Baigas gathered fruits, roots and tubers for satisfying domestic needs only. At the most they collected a little more for a casual sale in exchange of salt or ornaments or earthen wares. But the present day Baiga on whom the plough cultivation has devolved new economic burden collects forest produce, mainly of commercial value, like myrobalan, lac, resin, wax, tendu leaves etc. Exchange in the market and not domestic want is now the basis of collection of forest produce.

But often the sale-proceeds of surplus farm produce and forest commodities are not sufficient to meet his cash needs. Consequently he has to make attempts in other directions to earn cash. The aboriginal who was both master and worker before, has now accepted the position of a hired worker though with considerable resentment. Today the forest and road work rank with cultivation as a source of income. A Baiga, no doubt, adds to his income by this type of work, but he feels, as personal talks revealed, that forest work is not a regular source of income and that it has brought in its train many social and economic evils. Wage earnings in the absence of social restraints of the old order or modern education have damaged their self-supporting economy, killed enterprise and initiative in tribal economic pursuits, reduced them to the position of hired worker and created in them an attitude of recklessness, and exposed them to the dangers of famine of the worst type.

In plough farming Baiga has to incur more expenses on cultivation than he used to do on axe-cultivation. More seeds are required in a plough-cultivated field as sowing is done more closely. Purchase and maintenance of draught-cattle involve heavy expenditure. Even couple of rupees for the plough are beyond the means of the aboriginal. An analysis of Baiga's borrowings shows that his resources fall short of his requirements and consequently about 16.38 per cent loans are borrowed for agricultural purposes. The tragedy lies not so much in borrowing as in its dispersal on an enterprise which does not fetch a commensurate return. Due to the reasons discussed in previous chapters, the Baiga economy, of which agriculture is now the hub, has become a deficit economy.

But the picture has other side as well. Plough cultivation has raised Baiga's economic status and has opened new opportunities before him. As a settled farmer he has a permanent home, more assets of marketable value and an assessable amount of income, which have improved his credit as a borrower. The moneylender is not so reluctant now in advancing loans to the hill-man as before when the latter was living a nomadic life. The easy availability of loan from an unscrupoulus agency has, no doubt, its own evils. But it is also true that in the absence of this agency, the sudden switch over to plough cultivation would have brought disaster on the tribe for it was not possible for the Government to supply credit to lakhs of aboriginals living in most inaccessible parts of the Province. Increased credit worthiness of the Baiga induced the *Sahukars* to give loans although at a very high rate of interest.

Plough cultivation has revolutionised Baiga's agricultural technique. The axe has been replaced by the plough. Bakkar, Khanta, Hansia, and a host of other implements have taken their due place in Baiga's technique. The tribals have learnt not only to use them but also to mend and maintain them in good condition. In many places the local blacksmith (Agaria) has ceased to supply implements—Baigas now purchase iron implements in weekly markets and sometimes make payment in cash. Adoption of new tools has improved the technological level of the hill tribe. There is a marked progress in its technique of cultivation. As Baigas now raise various new crops they bestow more care on the selection of their fields particularly its ploughability, fertility, suitability for a particular crop, location etc. They prepare their fields with plough and *bakkar* (harrow) quite diligently and are aware of how many ploughings are necessary for a particular crop. Most of the Baiga—particularly of the mixed villages—now possess practical knowledge of the crop time-table. Where Baigas have settled in the plains, as in Baihar and Jabalpur districts, they have gained the knowledge of rotation of crops and practise it intelligently. They have modified their methods of sowing too. Formerly seeds were broadcast on Bewar plots irrespective of the distance between seeds, and the nature of the crop. But these days the Baiga agriculturist uses *jharna* (seed-spray) which is attached to the plough. In certain cases he sows with the help of dribbler. Baiga fields are a sight of proper sowing. However, the aboriginals have not become manure conscious as yet. This is so not because they are unaware of the importance of manure in agriculture, but some difficulties stand in their way. Often their fields are far away from their cattleshed. They cannot transport manure to the field as bullock cart is out of question in a country of hillocks and ravines. There are no pack animals in the Baiga villages, nor can they keep their cattle on the fields like villagers in the plains do as carnivorous animals are rampant in the forests. Could these difficulties be overcome Baiga will surely make increasing use of manures in his fields for he has been using manure on the small farm attached to his cottage.

Bari is not a new thing to the Baiga. Since generations tribals have been growing their tobacco, vegetables and maize crops on it. But it has received increased attention at the hands of the Baiga after the adoption of the plough. Since exchange basis of the Baiga agriculture has broadened as a result of plough farming, Baigas are now more keen on growing crops of exchangeable value. Baigas of *barra* land areas are anxious for having larger *baris*. As the *bari* gets heavily manured with dung and home refuse, it offers a better chance of improving agriculture than forcing the Baiga plough up *barra* uplands. Baris are suitable land for garden cultivation. But production on small plots of *baris* cannot meet Baiga's cash needs. The Bari crops solely depend upon rains. The aboriginal gives first priority to tobacco and seasonal vegetables which he does not sell in the market. In these circumstances, the only alternative left to the Baiga for earning ready cash is the forest and road work. This naturally leads us to study the effects of commercial exploitation of forests upon Baiga's economic life.

Exploitation of Forests

Forest and road work has undoubtedly increased Baiga's cash income. On an average a Baiga family earns about Rs. 136/13/- annually or nearly 44.8 per cent of total annual income is derived from forest and road employment. This helps the aboriginal in paying land revenue and taxes and in buying cloth and spices from the market. Wherever the working of forests is intensive and the working plans are executed quickly the demand for forest labour is quite brisk. There is then work not only for the few male members of the villages, but even women and children have a chance of supplementing the family income. For example, in Baihar tehsil the Forest Department provides sufficient work to the aboriginals. There is a Government Saw Mill at Mukki, Garhi is a Range Officer's headquarters and at Supkhar a Deputy Ranger is stationed to supervise the nursery. Consequently Baigas of this area derive nearly 63.4 per cent of their income from forest work. In Baiga villages of the northern Mungeli tehsil, they earn 63.4 per cent of their income from this source as a new road is being constructed which provides employment to all types of workers.

In forest villages people get more work and for a longer period. Construction, repair and maintenance of forest roads provide employment for nearly two months in a year and the *coupe* work for 3 to 4 months. On an average a Baiga family of forest village remains engaged on forest and road work from 3 to 4 months in the year. Besides, they enjoy certain privileges not available to the ordinary cultivator. Aboriginals can bring from forests without cost wood, fuel, bamboos, grass, edible roots and tubers for domestic purposes. Their cattle are also allowed to graze at concessional rates. Forest Department in addition organises certain welfare activities like schools for children, anti-epidemic campaigns and clearance of footpaths etc. The undesirable aliens are prevented from entering forest villages or advancing loans to the aboriginals. The Baiga is thus offered an opportunity of living a settled life. In forest villages where population is predominantly of the Baiga, tribal life has still some throbbing vitality and tribal solidarity.

The extension of forest operations to the remotest parts of the hill forests has brought Baigas within its orbit. Baiga was a reputed wood-cutter even before, but in his own way. The departmental working of forests and contractor's operations are making Baigas familiar with the modern technique of forest exploitation. Many of them, particularly in Mandla and Baihar tehsils, have learnt the use of saw machines. Those who work in Government saw mills or under contractors can prepare sleepers, planks and beams. Thus their level of technical knowledge has been raised. Baigas have also come to know the commercial value of certain forest products. Formerly they did not know the importance of *tendu* leaves and rarely collected them for exchange. But in recent times the value of *tendu* leaves has increased tremendously with the development of Biri industry in the State. Baigas are now engaged in collecting them in the *tendu* growing areas. Similarly in olden days resins and gums were collected only for incense and domestic needs. But the rising demand of these commodities has made the Baiga realise their trade value. Many Baigas belonging to the younger generation showed their awareness that persons living in cities útilised forest products collected by the former. A Baiga described different industrial uses of lac and gum. Commercial utilisation of forests has in a way improved the technical and commercial intelligence of the Baiga. The Baiga economy has been linked with national and foreign markets through forest produce as tanning materials, lac, hides and skins enter India's foreign trade.

But this linking with the market has brought with it numerous economic and social evils of first magnitude, which must be weighed against the benefits of commercial exploitation of forests. Reservation of forests and the various restrictions accompanying it have curtailed Baiga's 'freedom of forest'. The forest tribe has been reduced to a class of hired forest labourers. Under the present set up the Baiga cannot hunt freely, there are restrictions on the collection of certain forest produce, even bamboos cannot be felled for their petty basket-making industry, their methods of fishing have been circumvented and the cattle must be confined within the demarcated areas. The aboriginal feel the pinch of these restrictions at every stage of their economic life.

The game laws have deprived him of his meat dish which was a substantial factor in balancing his diet of coarse grains. Whatever little meat he is able to collect by way of killing small game, he does so with a sense of guilt and in violation of the laws. Besides this, forest work which has become a necessity for him, does not leave enough time and opportunity for collecting wild roots and tubers for his usual diet. Not only have the non-cereal articles been reduced in Baiga diet but he has been made more dependent on the market even for his coarse foodgrains. Pressed hard by his cash requirements, he readily accepts any work which brings cash often in lump sums. Charmed by the advantage, many Baigas neglect their fields or abondon cultivation altogether. Consequently they have to buy foodgrains from the market or some neighbour. Once the seeds of this tendency germinate, as they have in some forest villages and the villages situated in the intensively exploited forests of Baihar and Mandla, cultivation of foodgrains becomes a secondary affair slowly replaced by the forest work.

During the course of our personal talks with Baigas it was discovered that in some villages forest and road work had begun to interfere in agricultural operations. At the time of sowing and reaping aboriginals are reluctant to take up work of road construction or forest felling. But in the forest villages they have to do so under the forest laws, and in other villages economic needs dictate them to do it, as one time's refusal will lead to the removal of their names from the rolls of regular labourers of the village.

Forest work is thus one of the most important factors responsible for shaking the self-sufficiency basis of the Baiga economy. It has compelled the tribals to give up production or collection of certain commodities like wild food and coarse millets. Besides, it has increased their dependence on market even for primary needs. Baigas residing near busy forest coupes or roads, as on the Baihar-Supkhar road or Mawai-Chara route, are now regular customers of the Garhi and Bajag-Gopalpur markets respectively. Their contact with the markets has now assumed more importance from the point of view of scope, volume, value, regularity and frequency of transactions and the use of money. Most of the forest contractors or their agents make village markets as their headquarters where forest labour have to go for taking their wages, and buying their daily necessaries from the shopkeeper. Minor forest products are taken to these markets for cash sale the proceeds of which are utilised in paying land revenue and other taxes. These markets attract the Baiga for one more reason. As a result of their contact with 'alien' pattern of living, the tribals acquire taste for new articles of consumption which can be had only in these markets. Markets of Gopalpur, Bajag, and Bondar or Samnapur attract Baigas from as distant villages as Jhilang and Ajgartola situated in the interior of the Baiga chak. They buy new designs of cloth or ready-made garments, glass beads and bangles, small kerosene lamps, combs, metal ornaments, brass utensils etc. Increased contact with markets has introduced exchange system in the Baiga economy to a considerable degree.

As a result of breakdown of self-sufficiency the Baiga economy has become less stable. The forest employment which brings nearly 45 per cent of the total income is of irregular nature. Its volume and continuity largely depend on the decisions of the Government and their implementation by the Forest Department. Where forests are worked by the private contractors much depends on the nature of the contract and the contractor's resourcefulness. Then adverse weather conditions also interrupt the work. For instance, forest and road work remain completely suspended for nearly 4 months in the year. Consequently even in a forest village, the aboriginals do not get regular employment for more than 5 months in a year. Irregular employment, and that too depending on external factors, has reduced the element of stability in Baiga economy. The wage system has aggravated the instability further. Being a nomadic tribe Baigas have no experience of adjusting their family budgets to the wage system. They had no practice of spreading monthly wages over the whole month like the wage earner. Nor had they any habit of saving for the contingencies, for in the past they depended upon nature's supply of food. The forest worker, however, receives his wages not only at the end of the month, but at times in a lump sum after three or four months. In the absence of any tradition of regulated expenditure or formal education, the aboriginal worker squanders away his accumulated wages on liquor, bazar purchases and on the satisfaction of newly acquired wants. This leads him to borrowing for maintaining himself and his family till the next payment of wages. Thus the wage system in the absence of regulatory checks results in increased indebtedness of the tribals as on the one hand it makes the aboriginal spendthrift, and on the other a more attractive object for the moneylender. The average debt per family was found as high as Rs. 109/12/- in the Baiga villages of the Mandla district (the general average being Rs. 70/7/-) where commercial exploitation of the forest wealth is carried out intensively. The evil effects of forest employment could be minimised, had the hold of tribal customs and institutions on aboriginal life remained intact. But the independent source of income, change in the venue of work, replacement of elder's supervision by forest officials or contractor's agents, temporary imigration and the resulting disintegration of the family and tribal life—all have contributed in making the tribal individualistic and less obedient to tribal customs which exercised regulatory influence on their expenditure, particularly of a social nature. Once out of the social hold and unchecked by the influence of modern education, the Baiga forest worker becomes unscrupulous in his expenditure and thereby makes his budget unstable.

The effects of the forest work are not restricted to the economic sphere alone. New social problems of a very complex nature have cropped up in the tribal life. Since forest contracts are sold to anyone who bids the highest and little care is taken in selecting lower grade forest officials, the present day forest administration permits, and often encourages, a class of 'aliens' whose presence and dealings leave undesirable effect upon the tribal. These 'foreigners' look down upon aboriginal customs and their way of living. In the eyes of Hindus tribals are reduced to the position of 'untouchables', and a number of disabilities cripple the latter's social life. Baiga who is respected as a priest by other tribesmen finds himself at a very low rung of the ladder of social order under the new situation. The aboriginal feels ashamed of his own simple and natural faith. As a result he tries to ape the alien way of living; acquires new tastes and comes out of his own tribal setting. But his limited resources, knowledge and experience block the way. The rudder of social life being lost, he falls an easy prey to the anti-social practices of the 'civilised'.

The corrupt practices of forest contractors and their agents and petty officials have become so common as not to be taken seriously even by the tribals. Baigas have developed an attitude of resignation towards them. Although the wage rates are fixed by the Department, the contractors actually underpay the aboriginal worker and obtain their thumb-impression on the fixed rates. Sometimes the whole village is hired by the contractor and a lump sum is paid irrespective of the number of workers, number of hours worked, and the nature of the work. Similar complaints were made by the Baiga during our personal visit to the villages, in respect of road and forest work done under the Forest and Public Works Department. Fraudulent methods are also used while buying minor forest produce from the aboriginals. The District authorities or Forest Officers fix the prices at which the produce can be purchased by the private contractors from aboriginals who had collected it in non-contracted areas. But in actual practice contractors pay very low price to the aboriginal on the plea that the latter must have collected the produce from the contracted area. The practice of mortgage-purchases of forest produce by contractors is one of the patent causes of the aboriginals' indebtedness. Contractors pay a part of the price in advance on the condition that a particular quantity of certain forest produce will be delivered on the stipulated date. If the aboriginal fails to deliver the produce on the promised date, the advance payment is converted into a debt with a penalty and high rate of interest rising upto 150 per cent. Dishonest methods are used in weights and measures too, for the forest tribesmen is illiterate and ignorant. Where timber is transported by bullock carts as in Baihar and Mandla tehsils. contractors by giving advances on usurious terms make the aboriginal cartmen almost their bond-servants. The dealings of petty government employees also do not exert good effect upon aboriginals. Forest guards and police constables are a terror to the aboriginal villagers, they seize their forest produce, compel them to work at a time which interferes with agricultural operations, and at times without any payment. That administrative reforms have not checked these evils was evident from our personal experience and discussions with the aboriginals. Whenever any Government official visits the village, the aboriginals have to make arrangements for his food, ghee, oil, milk, fuel and water. Besides, two or three among them have to stop their work and attend on the visitor. In fact the normal work of the entire village is disturbed. Complaints were also made by the Baiga that forest guards demanded bribe for engaging the latter on forest work, or make deductions at the time of wage payment and obtain false receipts from the aboriginal worker. The Baiga who were once famous for their honesty and sincerety have been corrupted through such dealings. When a Baiga observes the 'civilised' practising dishonesty, his faith in simple and truthful living is shaken. He does not feel it necessary to obey the tribal code of conduct. Since the forest guard is the supreme authority governing his economic activities, the aboriginal accepts his guidance and leadership. But the misfortune is the forest guard himself does not represent the ideal element in 'alien' culture. He is uneducated, corrupted and unsympathetic towards the aboriginal. The presence in and rule of such a person over the village exercises a disrupting influence on the tribal life. It is not the established customs and conventions, but the forest guard's rulings which now govern the agricultural operations, hunting, fishing and even ceremonies of the tribal.

Various restrictions imposed by the modern administration, and the manner in which they are interpreted and enforced by the uneducated and unsympathetic forest guard, have curbed Baiga's forest activities. There is apparently a deterioration in Baiga's knowledge and experience of local flora and fauna. His hunting skill is on the decline, for game laws have created conditions of neurosis in tribal life. Consequently in many areas like Baihar and Jabalpur tehsils where forest officials' hold is more tight, the Baiga have in a way ceased to be a forest tribe.

Development of Transport

No single factor has contributed so much to the break-up of the isolation of tribal economy as opening-up of the aboriginal forest lands by means of transport and communication. Departmental working of forests and the needs of administration had hastened the development of transport during the last fifty years. Some of the most inaccessible tracts have been penetrated and made accessible to the motor cars. The road passing through Bondar—Jalda—Bajag connects the upper tract of the Baiga region with the Baiga Chak in the South of Dindori tehsil. The western tract is traversed by Samnapur road and the eastern part is connected by Chara-Chauradadar road. Road development is sufficiently developed in the Baihar tehsil except the Saletekri plateau where population is extremely sparse and the land is studded with rugged rocks and thorny bushes. On the north the Dindori-Amarkantak road draws the boundary line of the Baiga region. Most of these main roads are interlinked with forest roads and foot tracks.

The net-work of roads and a small railway line of 40 miles have not only made possible, but also given definite fillip to the export of forest and agricultural produce from the Mandla District. The railway line was opened in Mandla in 1911. The following table shows the effects of railway on the export trade of the district.*

TABLE SHOWING EFFECT OF RAILWAY ON EXPORT TRADE OF MANDLA DISTRICT

Names of the Railway Station in Mandla District	Year	Export in Maunds		Export in Tons
		Grains & Pulses	Wheat	Timber
Mandla	1910	7,121	31,918	4,620
	1925	28,673	1,77,876	12,140
Bamhni	1910	1,848	9,940	1,960
	1925	5.830	55,976	36,200
Chiraidongri	1910	140	2,212	3,948
	1925	190	2,478	23,183
Jamgaon	1910	...	...	510
	1925	...	...	6,668

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* Indrajit Singh : 'The Gondwana and the Gond', p. 181.

Development of transport has not only increased import and export trade of the region, but also helped the growth of village and weekly markets. Forest roads and foot tracks have rendered many areas accessible for trade purposes. For instance, the Bajag road is largely responsible for the development of Bajag market which attracts forest produce from distant places like the Baiga Chak. It is also a distributing centre of commodities of domestic consumption. Similarly the Baihar-Garhi road has opened up the area and expanded the weekly markets of Mukki and Garhi in Baihar tehsil. Roads have facilitated the movement of itinerant traders and pedlars who sell cloth, salt and beads in exchange for foodgrains and forest produce. These petty traders supply articles on credit and often mortgage the agricultural or forest produce at a stipulated price in advance. The practice deprives the aboriginal of advantages of the buyers' competitive market.

The monopoly of the trader-moneylender and contact with the markets made possible by the transport system, have changed the character of agriculture as well as forest work. Now the aboriginal cultivates or collects not what he needs for himself but what satisfies the demand of the market or the itinerant trader. This has led to commercialisation of tribal agriculture. In many villages particularly of the more opened up areas like Baihar, Niwas and Mandla tehsils, Baigas were found giving more preference to the cultivation of oilseeds, wheat and rice (which are not their staple diet). The tendency of purchasing foodgrains from the market is on the increase. The process of commercialisation is spreading to the collection of forest produce as well. Harra, tendu leaves. gum and resins, lac, etc. are receiving more attention at Baigas' hands than edible roots and tubers, for the former have greater commercial value. The change in the character of farming and collection of forest produce have further expanded the scope and method of exchange transactions in the Baiga economy. Since most of these transactions are of commercial nature, the hold of money economy is becoming firmer.

Since Baigas have now realised that money commands a general purchasing power, they are more keen on earning it than to re-attain self-sufficiency in their food requirements. The inevitable result is : Baiga economy, particularly in the opened up areas, today depends less upon the cultivation of staple foodgrains. Baiga population of more developed tracts like Mandla and Baihar tehsils earn nearly 68.8 and 63.4 per cent of its income from forest and road work respectively. Conversely in the Baiga Chak and the Baiga villages of Southern Dindori tehsil, where transport is least developed, the percentage of income from forest and road work is as low as 3.94 and 20.4 respectively. The change has, no doubt, diversified employment in the tribal areas; but its other effects also deserve consideration. The tendency may encourage negligence of food crops and make the aboriginal dependent on market for foodgrains. A year of bad crop, either in the region itself or in other parts of the country, will have disastrous repercussions on the food situation in the tribal areas. It may, however, be noted that transport system is yet not developed so much in the tribal areas as to organise food rationing on wide scale. The present state of transport, commercialisation of aboriginal agriculture and the collection of forest produce for the market, and inclination towards forest and road work have exposed the tribals to scarcity conditions more than the old order under which both farm and forest were linked with the kitchen and not with the market.

Modern transport has brought the tribe into direct touch with 'alien' culture. Contractors and their agents, moneylenders and pedlars, liquor dealers and their servants, school masters and social reformers, officials and their subordinates have reached the inaccessible tracts of the Baiga region through roads and foot tracks. The frequent contact with the outsiders has exercised two fold effect - the Baiga have learnt new language and developed new concepts and new ideas about life ; they have developed new outlook and new ambitions, and new wants. In the general elections of 1952 Baigas showed keen interest in voting and meeting agents of the political parties. At Mawai and Saliwara (Dindori tehsil) polling stations the Baiga voters thronged enthusiastically and considered it an historic day in their lives. The Baiga were described by Forsyth about 80 years ago as 'to stare wildly like startled deer at an amazing sight of an elephant ridden by a white man, fly over the fence with a shriek, and plunge into the thick wood of the little clearing'. But the present day Baiga is not so shy or afraid of outsiders. Now they cluster around the visitor and extend the warmest welcome. The officials are not so much feared—the Baiga of Mukki area (Baihar tehsil) during our visit brought a written application with their thumb-impressions (of course in cow-dung) regarding demand for more land and the irregluarity of forest work. Nanshah of Ladvani village (Dindori tehsil) complained bitterly about the rising prices of cloth and salt under the Congress Government. Phagnu Baiga of Kasai Kunda village in Kawardha tehsil requested us to represent to the Government to impose restrictions on frequent divorces among the Baiga. These examples are the indications of growing political consciousness, new concepts of social reform and economic improvement—all resulting from culture-contact hastened by the transport system.

Besides developing a new outlook, road construction has opened new avenues of employment to the tribal population. New constructions and the repair and maintenance of forest and P.W.D. roads require a huge labour force every year. Wherever lands are poor and the collection of forest produce is unremunerative, road work has become the main prop of aboriginal economy. Although it has brought many evils along with wage system and temporary imigration of aboriginal labourers, it can be safely said that road work has raised the money income of the aboriginal worker. As the data about aboriginal income under the old order are not available, it is difficult to calculate the rise in Baiga's cash income in recent years. But the increase in the number of cash transactions and Baiga's cash liabilities accompanied with payment of cash wages by the Government Departments and private contractors, prove that Baiga's cash income has gone up as a result of road development and its impact on general economy.

Progress of road transport without corresponding protective and developmental measures has, however, exposed the tribal economy to external forces over which the aboriginals have no control. It has broken the self-sufficient economy of the aboriginal and shaken the very basis of aboriginal household crafts. Many Baigas have given up bamboo work, because cheaper bamboo articles from other places reach the local markets. Machine extracted oil and kerosene oil are ousting the home-extracted *ramtila* oil and the industry connected with it. Motor transport has carried even combs, pins, mirrors, bangles etc., of urban style to the farthest corners of forests. Baigas are now, therefore, not so much interested in making articles of decoration out of feathers, leaves and grass. Import of spices from urban centres has discouraged the art of collecting, grinding and preserving Baigani *masala* (wild pungent roots and seeds). "The disappearance of tribal industries", as Elwin has observed, "has resulted in a psychological as well as material impoverishment" * The creative impulse in Baiga life is almost dead—there is no expression of aesthetic taste. He has sunk to 'the same dead level of inartistic futility; besides losing the main strength of his self-sufficient order.' Transport has thrust the 'alien' goods into the household economy without any compensating advantage in the form of mechanised industries in the tribal areas.

Decline of Aboriginal Handicrafts.

The social effects of modern transport on aboriginal life are no less significant. Road construction and repair necessitate the movement of labour from one place to another. Since the work is of a seasonal character aboriginal workers cannot take their families to the spot of work. This results in temporary break-up of the family. Baiga labourers being away from their homes and mixing freely with other tribals and non-tribals begin to flout the tribal code of social life and sexual morality. Their faith in tribal customs is weakened and they contract new diseases against which no immunity has been evolved. To be able to sit by the side of other tribals, the acculturised Baigas wear more clothes to cover their naked bodies. But they have no spare sets of clothes for washing and bathing. Dirty clothes and irregular bathing are the chief causes of many skin diseases prevalent among the 'civilised' Baigas ; while the Baiga using their traditional dress look clean, healthy and bright. The real Bhumias of Pandaria Zamindari and Kawardha tehsil who use only 'langoti' bear vast contrast to the Baiga of Baihar and Mandla Tehsils who have adopted the dress of Gonds, and Hindu villagers.

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* **Elwin : 'Loss of Nerve', p. 31**

Modern transport has proved one of the most effective instruments in tightening the administrative machinery in inaccessible hilly regions. To day the Forest, Excise, Police and Revenue officials, or their subordinate staff visit tribal villages personally. Enforcement of Government laws and the detection of their violation has become possible due to the development of transport. The forest guard in the forest villages and the Patwari in the ryotwari villages are the real leaders of the village life. Their wishes are the law for the villagers, not only in government matters but also in disputes, social ceremonies and social relations. This has slackened the elders' hold on the village life. The aboriginal's faith in tribal customs and institutions—in other words the collective tribal life—is giving way to official fiats.

Licensed Liquor shops

Liquor is an important medium of culture-contact in the Baiga region. Under the outstill system, which is in force in the aboriginal areas, the right to manufacture and sell country spirit is auctioned to contractors, who are given monopolies limited to defined areas. The greatest evil of the system is that it brings him (aboriginal) into contact with and often makes him dependent on a degraded type of 'alien', Liquor dealers seize every opportunity of taking the aboriginal into their clutches as the former have to make the most profits in the shortest time. It is, therefore, in the interest of the liquor dealer to encourage drinking among the aboriginals. Even this is not done consistent with the self-respect of the aboriginal. The 'alien' liquor contractor treats the aboriginal as wild and debauched. He does not realise that liquor is a necessary ingredient in aboriginal worship and social ceremonies. What is sin in the eyes of the 'alien' contractor has got social and religious sanction in the Baiga tribe. This basic difference in the attitude towards liquor creates complexities. The Baiga have been compelled to drink at the hands of one who considers the act of drinking immoral.

But it need not make us believe that the contractor maintains a pure atmosphere in and around the liquor shop. In fact these shops are crowded by bad characters, and this is an important cause of the degradation of the simple aboriginal.

The situation exercises a very demoralising effect upon the tribal. Under the home-distillery system he used to distill and consume liquor according to the social conventions of the tribe. With the suppression of home-distillery, social restrains have diappeared. A Baiga can now drink whenever he is in a position to buy a bottle with his own, or with borrowed money. The present arrangement has made him reckless in expenditure on drink. On wage payment days, the liquor shop has the appearance of a fair. The aboriginal does not hesitate in spending away the money even if it results in starvation next week. Although it has not been possible to establish any scientific relationship between drinking and indebtedness, for, like others the aboriginal is not prepared to make any self-inculpatory statements. But it is evident that loan which is at present borrowed for foodgrains will become unnecessary if the expenditure on drink could be diverted towards meeting other necessaries of life. Liquor dealers operating in the interior parts where official check up is difficult, sell drink on credit and charge exhorbitant rates of interest. Once the aboriginal falls into his trap, it is too difficult for him to extricate himself from it. The interest goes on accumulating—at times his account is used for selling liquor on credit to others—and ultimately the bankrupt aboriginal accepts the bonds of economic slavery in every manner. He may have to mortgage his own labour and even the labour of his family. Or he has to collect minor forest produce for the liquor contractor. The worst may happen—he may have to act as a pack animal for transporting Mahua or fuel from the jungle to the gates of the distillery and he has to do all this for a couple of seers of Kodon and a glass or two of liquor in a week.

Drinking under the present excise system, is the real cause of high social expenditure. Liquor is an important item of expenditure in Baiga's marriage and social ceremonies—nearly 25 per cent of total marriage expenses are spent on drink.* Baigas could distill the required quantity of liquor themselves before the enforcement of the modern excise laws and thus completely avoid the expenditure on this item. But under the outstill system the aboriginal must buy liquor from the shop at a price fixed by the Excise administration, often manipulated by the dealer himself. It adds to the total social expenditure and leads to borrowing.

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* Refer chapter on 'Expenditure and Standard of living' Section dealing with 'Expenditure on social ceremonies.'

During the course of personal talks the Baiga disclosed that of the two articles which worry them most in arranging a marriage, liquor is one, the other being clothes. Prohibition of home distilling and the high cost of licensed liquor push many aboriginal families into debt. Licensed liquor causes economic drain in other ways also. Since *mahua* liquor is a religious and social necessity for a Baiga, he must bring it even from a distant liquor shop. Besides, Baigas of Jhilan, for example, fetch liquor from Dhurkutta situated about 12 miles away. People of Supkhar must traverse hillocks, spread over 10 miles, to reach the Garhi distillery. Long trips entail loss of working days besides the strain of walking. Many times the aboriginal has to suspend his agricultural work. Since Baiga has a nomad's outlook, he is unable to plan his agricultural operations and calculate the possible loss due to his absenteeism. Frequent flight to the liquor shop interrupts his routine for which he has to pay a heavy price in the form of bad crops or depredations by animals.

These difficulties and the high price of the licensed liquor force Baigas to resort to illicit distillation. They collect *mahua* flowers from the forest and hide themselves in some forest trembling with the fear of law. Loyal and law abiding as the Baiga have been, violation of law is a serious incident in their lives. The tribesmen are surprisingly honest --earning an honest livelihood, living an honest life and maintaining honest relations with others. It is, therefore, a first rate tragedy of morals that excise system has forced them into the immoral act of illicit distillation. The pure aboriginal now prepares liquor with impure methods for the pure purpose of religious worship and innocent enjoyment. The situation has a demoralising effect upon the entire tribe. One act of dishonesty leads to another. They have to maintain an atmosphere of secrecy and conspiracy about their illicit distillation. Women are not told about it for they may leak out information to the neighbouring villages or markets. When Excise officials come to the village the entire village becomes terror-stricken—many people flee away to the forests. The remaining must tell lies after lies—but ultimately confess illicit distillation, bring the guilty before the officials, and raise some money for paying fines with a view to get rid of the terror of frequent official visits. The situation was personally experienced by us in Indri village (Mandla tehsil) which is well known for illicit distillation. The truth of the experience was further reinforced by the talks we had with old Baigas whose confidence could be gained by suggesting changes in excise system favoured by them. In nutshell the modern excise system has trained the honest and loyal tribesmen in illicit distillation.

Some Basic conclusions

Baiga's old order was primarily a food-gathering economy characterised by self-sufficiency, economic isolation and barter ; and the absence of money, wage system and hired labour. But the old order has undergone radical changes as a result of opening up of tribal regions, commercial exploitation of forests, prohibition of axe-cultivation, new excise system and culture-contact and social reforms. The modern forces have produced far-reaching effects upon Baiga economy which may be noted in brief :—

New Food economy

Prohibition of Bewar has converted Baiga's food-gathering economy into a primitive farm economy. Consequently the technique, equipment, scale and the kind of production have changed radically. The change has on the one hand, increased Baiga's economic burden, and on the other, opened new prospects before him. Due to inadequate resources, undeveloped plough cultivation and poor soils Baiga has not been able to avail himself of the opportunity well. He has started to grow various crops for selling in the market in order to meet his cash liabilities. This has destroyed his self-sufficiency in food and has exposed him to the risks of scarcity conditions. Even in normal years the Baiga agriculture is a deficit economy due to *barra* soil, primitive technique and natural hazards. This has either pushed the Baiga into debt or ousted him from agriculture and forced him to seek forest work. In the social sphere too the effects are no less significant. Prohibition of *bewar* and modern game laws have disturbed the former equilibrium between cultivation and food-gathering and hunting. They have caused radical changes in the contents of Baiga diet and made it a pre-dominantly cereal diet. The rituals, magic and myths connected with *bewar* are also losing their hold on the tribe without any substitute in their place in the form of modern scientific methods or State aid.

Advent of Money economy

Baiga's cash liabilities have increased in recent times due to new land revenue system, imposition of grazing tax and *nistar* charges, need of more seeds and bullocks, repayment of debt, direct market purchases and licensed liquor shop. The aboriginal tries to meet his increased cash needs by raising commercial crops, selling forest produce and forest and road work. Money has thus become a vital link between production and exchange. Consequently exchange transactions are expanding in volume, nature and scope. There has been an increase in the money income of the Baiga, he has now more purchasing power and his credit-worthiness has improved. But money economy has brought some evils too in its train. Baiga's self-sufficiency has been shaken to its foundation. Economic stability (peculiarly attained in old primitive life) and tribal co-operation are on the decline. Advent of money exchange without its other concommitants *viz.*, measures of social security and State regulation, has exposed the tribal life to economic fluctuations and exploitation by more resourceful and better organised sections of the society. The resulting evils are : profiteering by traders and itinerant pedlars, mortgage of crops and labour, exhorbitant rates of interest, fraudulent and malpractices by private contractors, and corruption and bribery among the Government Staff.

Contact with Markets

Regular contact with the market is a corrollary of the exchange economy. Baiga's increasing participation in forest work and less interest in food-gathering activities have made him dependent on market for his food supply. Disposal of forest produce also takes him to the market. Some of the newly acquired wants can be satisfied only through market purchases. The licensed liquor shop, which is situated in market place always attracts him. Frequent contact with the market encourages him to raise cash crops. It has changed the purpose of collection of forest produce, too. The purchase of necessaries and certain new articles of rural taste has brought about a decline in tribal handicrafts and encouraged the export of agricultural and forest products from the aboriginal areas. Markets bring him into contact with the outsiders whose social and cultural influence is quite evident on the tribal life. Market sales have become the cause of exploitation of the aboriginal. Traders and middlemen take the fullest advantage of aboriginal's simplicity, ignorance and illiteracy. The low margin of profit in sales is one of the chief factors responsible for aboriginal's indebtedness.

Tribal Indebtedness

With the disappearance of tribal self-sufficiency and increased cash liabilities, the tribal system of reciprocal aid has declined. Borrowing from external agencies is on the increase. Deficit agricultural economy, malpractices by forest contractors and the modern excise policy have pushed the aboriginal into Sahukar's clutches. Improvement in aboriginal's credit-worthiness due to settled cultivation, wage system and opening up of inaccessible areas have facilitated sahukar's operations. The per capita incidence of tribal debt compared with rural incidence may not be so high ; but considering the former's family income, greater vulnerability to exploitation and absence of effective protective State legislation, the burden of debt is definitely more. Borrowing at exhorbitant rates, mortgage and sale of moveable property in discharge of debt and repayment of debt through personal labour are the direct results of moneylender's operations in the tribal tracts. Government measures have not succeeded in checking these evils as yet, and nothing short of a basic change, in economic relationship between the aboriginal and the outsiders, can solve the problem.

Decline of Household Crafts

Adoption of plough-cultivation, restrictions imposed by the Forest and Game laws, growth of markets in tribal areas and their increased accessibility, acquisition of new tastes as a result of contact with outsiders and the declining influence of aboriginal rituals and customs have undermined the very basis of tribal crafts. This has disturbed the former harmonious integration of agriculture with cottage industries and destroyed the diversity of occupations in aboriginal economy. Like rural people the tribals are fast becoming a class of agriculturists. Besides, the avenues of employment have shrunk in aboriginal villages and unemployment and under-employment are showing their ugly effects on the tribal life. Apart from increasing aboriginals' dependence on external markets for the supply of certain consumption goods, the market purchases raise Baiga's cost of living. Above all, the decline of Baiga's arts has killed the creative impulse of the forest tribe. This has led to æsthetic as well as economic impoverishment of one of the finest tribes of India.

Exploitation of Forests

The exploitation of forests on modern lines has caused a fundamental change in the Baiga land. Forest operations are the most important medium of culture-contact and new economy. The aboriginal's outlook and knowledge have widened through new type of work and touch with the 'civilised'. Baiga has become more 'money' and 'market' minded. Other ameliorative measures of social and educational value have also benefitted him. He is able to earn more money income also. But the liability side of the forest policy also deserves readers' attention. Forest laws have curtailed Baiga's 'freedom of forest' and compelled him to give up his axe-cultivation, hunting and fishing and food-gathering activities to a considerable extent. Baigas are now not self-sufficient in food and their diet has reached the point of malnutrition. They have been reduced to the position of hired labour and have become victims of unregulated wage system. The irregular forest work, negligence of cultivation and the disappearance of primitive forestry have rendered the tribal economy unstable. Above all, forest work has brought the aboriginals into contact with undesirable elements of 'alien' culture and made them familiar with dishonesty, corruption and bribery. The fine qualities of simplicity, sincerity and truthfulness have been killed in many Baiga families.

CHAPTER XIV

REHABILITATION OF THE TRIBE

We have studied in the preceding chapters the economic life of the Baiga tribe. From the point of view of the impact of culture-contact, the tribe can be classified under three broad categories : Baigas who still live primarily as food-gatherers and hunters, those who have taken to plough cultivation and lead a settled life, and lastly those who have merged into other tribes culturally. The forces of modern life are pushing the persons of the first type into the second, and that of second into the third. Thus the entire tribe is passing through a period of transition at varying speeds. The economic change, as we have seen earlier, is coming about in an unregulated and unplanned manner. Consequently it has brought in its train a number of problems for the tribals. Prohibition of bewar has reduced the Baiga to the position of a marginal cultivator, always threatened with the fear of food shortage. Forest policy has circumscribed Baiga's food-gathering and hunting activities. Contract system has reduced him to the position of a hired labourer. Modern administration has increased his cash liabilities and the advent of money and exchange system has destroyed his self-sufficiency in food. The aboriginal is now more vulnerable to exploitation by money-lenders. His debt, on the whole, is becoming more and more burdensome. Excise policy has brought him into the contact of anti-social elements. A host of other evil effects may be enumerated, but it would be a partisan view to overlook the beneficial effects of the forces of civilisation on aboriginal life. Transport has brought the aboriginal out of his isolation and enabled him to see the outside world. Now he is not shy. He is slowly becoming aware of his rights and privileges. He has a wider outlook. Cultivation of commercial crops and regular contact with the market is converting the hunter into a farmer-cum-trader. Gradually he is picking up the technique of plough farming. Forest administration helps him in leading a settled life. Opening up of forests has brought him into touch with outsiders from whom he has learnt new tastes about dress, diet, utensils, decoration and festivals. The process of acculturisation has, thus, been a two-pronged movement—destruction of tribal order and ushering in of modern civilisation.

Ordinarily the scientist does not probe into the ethical aspect of a problem. His main job is to record evidence and state the facts as they are. But the scientist who has come to know and love the people he has studied will naturally desire the best for them. He will, therefore, not be untrue to science if he goes a little outside his domain and discusses measures for a tribe's progress in the future. Besides, the problem of the Baiga is of such great urgency and is so much neglected that a researcher's personal concern about it is natural. The normative side of social science will be well served if the scientist lays down certain fundamentals of a scheme which could reduce the harmful effects of culture-contact to the minimum, and secure the maximum benefits of civilisation to the aboriginal.

It is worthwhile to recapitulate certain basic facts about the Baiga before discussing any measures of rehabilitation. The Baiga are a forest tribe by tradition, culture and belief. The wild flora and fauna provide the base of his socio-economic structure. Until the establishment of modern administration Baiga was 'lord of jungle' in a literal sense. But the modern forest policy has curbed his forest rights, and he resents this vehemently. Increasing number of Baigas is taking to forest work, but present day commercial exploitation of forests has introduced many evils in tribal life. There is a need of reorienting the forest policy in such a way that it assures a promising place to tribals in the forest economy, and serves the interests of civilisation to a reasonable extent.

Baiga villages, particularly in the interior, are still maintaining self-sufficiency in necessaries of life (except cloth and salt which Baigas do not require much). Wherever this self-sufficiency has been severely damaged the Baiga economy has been badly shattered. Although the tribals in many areas have acquired new tastes and habits, a Baiga still yearns for simple living managed with his own efforts. Since the disintegrating effects of culture-contact in their case have not gone so deep, tribal solidarity and cooperative feeling are still alive. The tribesmen are hard working, honest and frugal. They have been living a life of isolation for generations; the desire to live life in their own way is extraordinarily strong. All the neighbouring tribes accorded great respect to this priestly class and accepted its wise advice in dispute, disease and drought. Almost every Baiga is conscious of the good traits of his tribe, and he is anxious to retain them in the future set-up of things. Any 'uplift' scheme to be acceptable to the tribe, must really lift it up and not leave it at the lower rung of the social ladder where it is likely to be treated as backward or untouchable. The Baiga want to give their best to the society as in the past, but they are equally keen on retaining the essentials of their self-sufficient order. Only a regulated and planned transition can avoid severe jerks to the aboriginal order, and yet canalise its virtues in a proper evolution of the tribe.

The Baiga have been carrying on axe-cultivation since times immemorial. They had built an economic order primarily which was based on shifting cultivation and hunting. Their traditions and beliefs are rooted in this type of agriculture. Despite the prohibition of *bewar* for 85 years, the Baiga's love for it has not declined. Apart from traditional attachment to the system, the geographical conditions of the Baiga areas also explain Baiga's attitude towards *bewar*. Barra soil is most common throughout the Baiga zone, which yields very poor crops and does not respond to human efforts. Forest tracts are inaccessible, rendering their commercial exploitation an uneconomic proposition. In the existing circumstances, as the Baiga say, *bewar* is the only means of livelihood available to them and restrictions on it result in economic difficulties for the tribesmen. Besides, the tribe has neither inherited skill in plough cultivation nor has it the requisite means for coming on par with the plough cultivator.

The per capita or income per family is extremely low, *viz*. Rs. 48-12-0 and Rs. 305-6-0 respectively. It is not sufficient even for meeting the primary needs of food, clothing and shelter. The breakdown of self-sufficiency and the decline of household crafts and hunting activities, have further aggravated the evil effects of low income. The rise in agricultural prices and wages during the last decade has not benefitted the tribal people as most of them were marginal cultivators without any surplus for selling at a higher price in the market. Rise in wages was considerably set off by the rise in the prices of salt, cloth, oils, and agricultural implements.

Baigas have almost a uniform pattern of living. Since the cases of disparity in income are very few, the per capita consumption of necessaries is found to be in consonance with the set standard prevalent in the tribe. Wealth is considered a means to satisfy human wants and not a means to seize social power or for display. Being a traditional food-gatherer the Baiga are not very keen on accumulating wealth. Most of them aspire to live a life of contentment and self-support. Among themselves, they will not compete with one another nor will anyone try to trample over his tribesmen and emerge as an economic power. Baigas at present have hardly any idea of economic disparity and whatever they have come to know of it is the direct result of contact with the outsiders. Absence of competition and inequalities offers a most congenial condition for developing a cooperative life, of course adapted to the traditions of tribal life.

Another basic fact which deserves consideration is the survival of Baiga's household crafts. The aboriginals' self-sufficient economy has not broken down completely, although the modern economic forces have given it rude shocks. There are still certain crafts which have not lost their vitality altogether. Nor is the creative urge wholly dead among the tribals. Inspite of the sale of articles of 'alien' taste, the Baiga still take pride in their crafts and are anxious to retain them as a means of satisfying family needs. The Baiga products, it may be noted, were originally not meant for exchange, but for direct consumption. Some crafts still retain this characteristic and the tribals make surplus articles only when they are in need of ready cash. Most of the Baiga crafts are based on forest products and, therefore, in any scheme of the revival of tribal crafts it will be essential to adjust the forest rights of the aboriginal with the needs of his crafts. Secondly, the self-sufficiency motive will have to be preserved in the initial stages of craft development in order to revive the social basis of tribal crafts and enthuse the aboriginals for voluntary response.

As far as drink is concerned Baiga's notions are much different from those of the 'civilised'. Baiga does not consider alcoholic drink as immoral. In fact, Mahua liquor is used in religious worship, magic and social ceremonies. It is used as medicine also in certain diseases. Mahua flowers being available in plenty, the tribals had been distilling liquor in their homes before the advent of modern Excise system. Home-distilling was an important household industry in the olden days. But the Excise administration has suppressed it, much to the dissatisfaction of the aboriginal. This has resulted in a game of hide and seek between the Excise staff and the illicit distiller. Besides, the outstill system has put the aboriginal into contact with 'degraded alien' who creates an inferiority complex among the brave forest tribe. The system is also responsible for the indebtedness of the aboriginal, and for some of their spend-thrift habits. Due to the religious and social significance of liquor in tribal life and the effects of modern Excise policy, the aboriginals do not welcome any suggestion of prohibition or rationing of liquor. Instead there is a general demand for the restoration of home-distilling without any restriction. Most of the Baiga believe that abolition of the outstill system will relieve them of drink expenditure and the need of borrowing money on many occasions. The Baiga refute the general belief that home-distilling will lead to excessive drink. Their assertion is that once 'freedom of distilling' is granted the conditions will become normal and they will begin to distill the drink in a normal manner. The cases of indulgence, as they say, are nothing but reaction to the restrictions imposed by the present day Excise administration. Once they are lifted, the social sanctions of tribal life will regulate liquor drinking, and the cases of indulgence will become concern of the community. Such is the Baiga opinion about the modern Excise system.

On the whole, the Baiga have a better standard of health than other neighbouring tribes. Forest life, cereal diet supplemented with wild fruits and roots and meat, their nearness to nature, way of living and hunting activities have made them a sturdy tribe. Baigas as a tribe enjoy the reputation of being sorcerers and medicinemen. They have a wonderful knowledge of medicinal herbs and fruits and have evolved a separate system of curing disease which is respected even by the rural population. But the incidence of certain diseases like malaria, respiratory and skin diseases, and deficiency diseases is considerably high, due to malnutrition, insanitary living conditions and climatic factors. To reduce the incidence of these diseases, it is necessary to improve diet, environmental hygiene and popularise curative medicine. Baiga is not averse to the use of modern medicine but at present it is beyond his means to accept such costly treatment. It is, therefore, no surprise that the tribesmen still look to the *gunia* (medicineman) in times of crisis.

In respect of education, the Baiga may register the lowest percentage of literacy. A literate Baiga is a rarity to be found after great search. The modern primary school is conspicuous by its absence in most of the Baiga villages. The Baiga in general are not even aware of the modern system of education. As a result, there is no demand for educational facilities by them. They consider the three R's as something 'alien', not necessary for living a truly tribal life. But this does not imply that they have no tradition of education in the tribe. Baigas train their young boys in forest work, hunting, fishing, fruit gathering, cattle-herding, dances, games and social ceremonies. Crafts have a special attraction for them, as the Baiga's entire life centres round primitive forest industries. Any system of education which is adapted to their cultural traditions and economic conditions stands a good chance of success. The idea of education through some productive work was welcomed by the Baiga in their personal talks. Forest industries can provide productive work to the aboriginals on a wide scale. But the entire forest policy must be overhauled to serve this purpose.

CONTROL AND REGULATION OF FOREST EXPLOITATION

Licensing of Contractors

To prevent the entry of unscrupulous and a degraded type of private contractors in tribal areas, the State should issue licences to those individuals only whose antecedents are considered satisfactory by the District authorities. A register should be maintained by the Divisional Forest Officer indicating the names of approved contractors. The forest rules should lay down certain conditions which every approved contractor will have to observe while dealing with the aboriginal workers. Besides forfeiting the security, the contractor should have his name struck off the register in case his dealings with the labourers are proved to be unfair.

Regulation of Wages

The State should undertake the responsibility of fixing, regulating and enforcing a minimum wage payable by the private contractors to their forest labourers. In view of the rising market it becomes the moral duty of the Government to see that there is no time lag, and that forest wages go up at least *pari passu* with the increase in the price of the commodities which the aboriginals have to buy. Enforcement of a minimum wage will involve some diminution, especially at first. in the scale of bids received at the auction of coupes, but justice demands that the forest-dwellers should be treated somewhat better and the Government should be prepared to accept a reduction, if necessary in their revenues which they have been deriving in part from the sweated labour of the aboriginal tribes. Rates for piece work (per 100 trees, or a specific weight of a particular commodity) should be adjusted so as to bring net individual earnings into line with the daily wage rate. The practice of piece wages should be stopped wherever it leads to underpayment, delayed payment or fraudulent tactics, as is the case at present in piece-work payments made for fire protection. line clearing, repairs of boundary lines and road repair. It should be made incumbent upon contractors to make payment in full every week. At important centres of forest operations a Government official should supervise the payment of wages at least once a month. The contractor or his agent should be asked to maintain a muster-roll and pay register which must be checked by the said official. Forest officers and senior revenue officers should regularly ascertain by careful and private enquiries among workers that proper payments are actually received. The contractors who are also in some cases moneylenders should not be permitted to make any deductions from wages in payment of debts.

The task of enforcing wage regulation in tribal areas will be found very difficult because the contractors' position is almost unassailable, aboriginals are not organised and have resigned themselves to the existing state of affairs ; the forest areas are not easily accessible and the petty Government officials are also a party to the deal against the simple aboriginal folk. It is, therefore, proposed to set up Circle Forest Wage Boards to fix and regulate the wage rates in their respective circles through the Forest Department or through Revenue administration, wherever the former does not find itself in effective control of the area.

The Forest Labour Welfare Officer, proposed to be appointed, should also see that wage payments are made according to the rules in force. The wage rules must also prescribe deterrent penalty for infringements of the rules, if necessary, by blacklisting the offending contractors. In addition, compensation for workers who have been underpaid, should be leviable on contractors. Further, an obligatory clause should be introduced in the agreements under which the contractors should obtain a certificate from the Forest Ranger to the effect that wages had been paid to the labourer according to the rules. Transportation of timber should not be allowed unless such certificates are produced. The social workers will render an important service to forest tribes if they bring to the notice of authorities cases of violation of wage rules.

Prohibition of Contractor's moneylending operations

Forest contractors combine their forest operations with money lending. They pay only a fraction of the actual amount of wages and withhold aboriginal's earnings on the pretext of old debt and the interest accruing on it. Moreover, the contractors take advantage of aboriginal's inability to make even the simplest calculations, and despite deliveries of large quantities of forest products the burden of indebtedness is increased rather than decreased. This pushes the tribal into economic bondage of the contractor. The law should prohibit moneylending operations of the private contractors and if any one wants to advance loans in cash or kind he should obtain a separate licence for moneylending business. The debts of bond-serfs should be terminated forthwith through law and the aboriginal worker should be relieved from the clutches of the *Sahukar*-contractor.

'Fair deal' clause in contracts

With a view to improve the working conditions of contractors' employees the Government should insert some reasonable conditions in the forest contracts. Besides a wage rate and the method of wage payment, discussed earlier, the contract should provide for the maintenance of muster-rolls and other labour accounts in a prescribed form which must be signed by the contractor or his agent and be produced for inspection, and be regularly inspected by the forest officers and senior revenue officers. The number of hours constituting a day's work should be fixed. The employment of children of school-going age should be prohibited. Wherever the work is of arduous nature the contract should make provision for rest hours. Timber felling at times has to be done in highly malarial spots or places frequently visited by wild animals. The contractors should be required to undertake preliminary anti-malarial measures and safety arrangements against carnivorous animals. First-aid arrangements must also be made compulsory under the contract.

Extension of Departmental working

The enforcement of rules and imposition of certain conditions in forest operations may compel some private contractors to withdraw from the trade. The Forest Department should immediately step in and extend its working to the areas left by the contractors. The likely objections against departmental working are : smaller profits to the Government and decline in the efficiency of working methods, increase in establishment charges, difficulty in getting labour due to contractor's hold and official's inadequate information and experience of the market demand. Against these may be considered : the inevitable decline in Government's forest revenue due to low bids by contractors on account of enforcement of a minimum wage, the possibility of employing better mechanical appliances and reimbursing extra-staff from profits hitherto taken away by private contractors, restoration of freedom to the aboriginals with regard to choice of employer and relief from debt as a result of new measures and the consequent release of bonded labour; and the advantages of a near-monopoly-seller to the Forest Department in the open market. Despite all these advantages if departmental working involves some loss of revenue to the Government, it should not be considered socially unsound for it is a Government's duty to ensure a 'just deal' for the weakest section of the society.

More Forest Villages

The dearth of land for cultivation, soil exhaustion in the revenue villages and the treatment of landlords and moneylenders have made the forest village an attractive proposition for the aboriginal. Here the aboriginal is subject to low land revenue assessment, he enjoys substantial grazing and *nistar* concessions and receives priority in forest employment. The Government should order for a survey of forest lands which could either immediately or in the near future be deforested for settling forest villages without loss to the State. A comprehensive plan should be drawn up for creating new forest villages, particularly of forest tribes, and adequate facilities should be given to the new settlers for erecting houses, grazing cattle, collection of forest produce and forest employment. The proposal may appear to be regressive in the first instance, as the tribals will be deprived of contact with the outsiders. But on a closer examination it will be found that the tribals in a forest village will be saved from exploitation by *Sahukars* and private contractors, and secondly, they will enjoy various types of privileges and facilities under the Forest Administration. Settlement in forest villages will ensure a regulated and planned progress of the aboriginal under the paternal guidance and help of the Government. These benefits will, however, accrue to the forest villager only when certain basic changes are introduced in the system of forest villages Firstly, it should be made obligatory upon the Forest Guard to consult the Village Panchayat in matters concerning the welfare of the village as a whole. Secondly, a better type of person who is educated and has an enlightened attitude towards aboriginal life, should be posted in such villages. Lastly, the calender of forest work should be drawn up in harmony with agricultural operations and with the approval of tribal agriculturists, as far as possible. In a nutshell, the forest work should be organised in such a manner that it generates a feeling of joint responsibility and an *espirit de corps* instead of 'Official Terror', between the aboriginal worker and the forest staff.

Forest Cooperatives

Despite the forces of modern individualism, tribal life does not lack in cooperative spirit, communal institutions and fellow feeling. Hunting, fishing, honey collection, gathering of fruits and roots, construction of huts, rituals and worship, songs and dances—are more than a cooperative activity. They are living parts of a social organism. The tribal community can very well be developed into a cooperative order of a modern type. Once the influence of private contractors is liquidated from the forest economy and the aboriginals are given necessary freedom and initiative in forest operation guided by a benevolent forest staff, the tribals will be found most suitable for forest cooperative institutions. The Baiga should be encouraged to organise themselves into cooperative societies for the exploitation of forests and the collection of forest produce. The Forest Department should give *coupes* of bamboos and timber, or a contract for collecting forest produce in a defined area to the cooperative society on concessional rates in the initial stages. The members of the society will then proceed with the operations on a joint basis and the Forest Department should be made responsible for organising the transport and disposal of the product. The Cooperative Society, whose capital will partly be raised through share capital and partly from Government-aid, will decide its own piece or time wages and arrange for their payment in cash, grain, cloth, salt, oil and tobacco. The principle underlying the scheme should be that by their work in the *coupes* the Baiga should be able to obtain all they are in need of, and that no member of the community should ever be required to deal with moneylenders or private contractors. If necessary even weddings may be financed from the common purse. The organisational details are a matter for the expert, but it may be mentioned that Baiga tribe offers a good opportunity to the modern cooperator for effecting social evolution of a primitive economy by means of cooperative technique. The results achieved in other places are very encouraging.* Cooperative efforts have raised the tribal's standard of living, anti-social elements have been routed from the aboriginal tracts, education is on the march and medical help has been brought to the aid of the tribal. More important than this material progress is. as Dr. Haimendorf has remarked about the Hyderabad experiment, the psychological change in the Raddis. Freedom from oppression and debt has made them more self-possessed and cheerful. they work now with the consciousness of reaping the full fruits of their labour.†

Concession in grazing rates and nistar rights

The Baiga need freedom in one more sphere. Although there is at present hardly any complaint against grazing rates and nistar charges, the feeling is widespread that no grazing rates should be charged on cattle absolutely indispensable for bonafide agricultural purposes and on the cattle reasonably necessary for quasi-agricultural pursuits such as the supply of milk, manure and bullocks. Such a concession, it is suggested, may be granted by the Government in the predominantly aboriginal areas. This will not involve heavy loss to the Government as the population in these tracts is very sparse. Nor will any harm be done to the grazing fields, as often grass rots here without being used. But this little concession will have a tremendous psychological effect upon the aboriginal population whose contribution to the development of forests is considerable. This measure will give them a feeling of freedom and some sense of ownership over the use of grazing lands, provided the purpose is bonafide. But for preventing the misuse of the concession and checking the influx of cattle from non-tribal areas, a watch will have to be kept by the village headman on the number of cattle that every villager keeps. In case any person begins to graze cattle other than his own, the headman should immediately inform the forest guard or revenue staff and the person concerned be penalised for the offence. However, it will not be far from reality to presume that such cases of offence will be few, for aboriginals are surprisingly honest in their dealings and loyal to the Government. The offences at present arise mainly due to the manner in which grazing lands are demarcated and the dishonest practices of the Forest staff. Demarcation of reserved forest lands too close to the village boundary creates enormous difficulties for the villagers, as cattle go astray so often in the reserved areas. Often simple aboriginals are implicated by the forest staff for extracting something from the former. Penalties for such offences create bitterness between the Government and the aboriginal population. Abolition of grazing rates on cattle kept for bonafide agricultural and quasi-agricultural purposes will certainly restore tribal's faith in administration and remove the chances of corruption by the petty officials.

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* (a) Grain Banks and Multipurpose Depots in Bhil area in the West Khandesh District. Annual Report on the working of the Backward Classes Department for the year 1946-47, Bombay State ; and Symington Report on Aboriginal Tribes of Bombay. Pp. 16-20.

(b) Haimendorf 'The Reddis of the Bison Hills', Pp. 314-317.

† Report of the Partially Excluded Areas Enquiry Committee, Orissa, 1940, Pp. 95-99.

W.V. Grigson: 'The Aboriginal Problem in the Central Provinces & Berar', p. 350.

Similarly, Nistar concessions at present granted to forest villagers and the aboriginals of rural areas should be further relaxed. Like the forest villages, other predominantly aboriginal villages should be permitted a free supply of all thorns and wood required for bonafide agricultural purposes, also of wood and grass for housebuilding and repairs, also of dead wood for fuel, also bamboos and leaves and any edible fruits or flowers and roots required for domestic purposes. The list of purposes for which forest products are at present allowed free of cost to the forest villager should be expanded so as to include the following : (a) the construction and repair of aboriginal's carts; (b) housing materials in any aboriginal villages selected for reconstruction as a model village or in any area where planned rehousing of villagers is in progress ; (c) materials for cottage and (d) materials for traps, snares and weapons.

Fair Enforcement of Game Laws

To meet the aboriginal's fondness for hunting and meat, tribal villages should be allowed to shoot a wild game free of fee for some months in the year to be decided by experts. But the real relief will be felt by the aboriginal when the enforcement of game laws is improved and done more intelligently and honestly by the Forest and Revenue Staff. The.petty officials should be given proper education and training in the contents, interpretation and application of games laws. At times out of sheer zeal they stretch the law too far and harass the aboriginal illegally. But the more frequent cases are of dishonest practices on the part of petty officials where the intention is either to penalise the individual for not offering a bribe or doing manual work, or to grab the kill or its hide for personal use. The Superior Staff at the time of their tours should try to detect such cases of corruption and award exemplary punishment to the guilty person. The corruption can also be checked by educating the Baiga in game laws and the manner of their enforcement. The Kutwar and Mukkadam should be made to understand the provisions of the law and should be often reminded of them and amendments made therein from time to time. Government officials while on tour should also explain these laws to the villagers and assure them of their fair enforcement.

The recruitment of Baigas in the subordinate forest services will minimise the chances of corruption and at the same time restore confidence among their own tribesmen. Besides, they enjoy reputation as woodcutters and their practical knowledge of local flora and fauna still unsurpassed by any other tribe. The Forest Department will definitely be benefitted by their knowledge and simultaneously hasten the conversion of the axe-cultivator into a modern forester.

Forest labour welfare officer

The staff of the Forest Department is at present over worked with administrative duties, commercial activities and silvicultural operations. It has neither time nor tradition for protecting the interests of the aboriginal labour working in forest areas. Therefore, a Forest Labour Welfare Officer should be appointed in every Range. He should be made responsible for collecting complaints from aboriginals regarding the working of forest villages, *nistar* concessions and grazing fees, enforcement of game laws and general treatment by officials. Since the officer will have to function as the 'custodian of aboriginal's interests', he should be an educated and enlightened person with sympathetic attitude towards the aboriginal people. He should act as a watch-dog of tribal's privileges and a standing warning to the officials and private contractors against their mal-practices and corruption.

Development of Baiga Agriculture

Agriculture is the second most important source of income of the Baiga. In fact, they consider it the most vital part of their economic existence. Agriculture has assumed more importance after the prohibiton of shifting cultivation. But the standard of Baig's agriculture has not improved in proportion to its importance in his economic life. There are no agricultural traditions behind his technique. He has hardly any calendar of crop rotation. The Baiga plough merely scratches the ground. Broadcast sowing is the general practice among the Baiga. Irrigation is almost unknown in the Baiga land. His agricultural implements are of the primitive type. In a nutshell the Baiga agriculture is still passing through its primitive stage. Since his technique is not the outcome of natural evolution, Baiga's agricultural economy needs rehabilitation in a planned and scientific manner.

More land for Baiga cultivator

As discussed in the chapter on 'Plough Cultivation', the soil of the Baiga land is of the Barra type; the Baiga cultivator has very small patches of fertile land, over 60 per cent of the Baiga holdings are uneconomic and the Baiga are finding it difficult to get more land for their expanding families. Therefore the most urgent need of the Baiga is more land for cultivation. The Government should undertake a survey of the land requirements of the tribe and order for a fresh allotment of lands in the light of its findings. However, some broad suggestions may be made to solve the problem in its various facets :

(a) Where the land is mainly hilly and the forests cannot be exploited profitably and the Baiga are insistent on Bewar system, the Government should demarcate a belt for bewar-cutting. But care should be taken that bewar plots are not too small, nor should the Baiga be required to cultivate the same plot for more than three years. Simultaneously measures should be taken for replanting of trees on the scortched fields.* Efforts should also be made for reclaiming the uncultivable lands on river banks, in valleys and deep forests so that the Baiga may utilise them for permanent agriculture.

(b) In areas where the Barra lands predominate and where there is no possibility of expanding area under the Kanhar, Morund and Siliad fields, the Baiga should be given land on the principle of 'rotating cultivation'. Naturally the area of holdings in such places will be larger so that the cultivator may raise three continuous crops on a Barra field and then leave it fallow for 3 to 4 years for recuperation. The State should undertake a survey of these areas and determine the needs of individual villages and their families.

(c) The 'backgarden' cultivation should be encouraged among the Baiga and the area under it should be increased for every family. Wherever hillocks or water streams impose a limit on the expansion of *bari* land, Baigas should be pursuaded to settle down in new small villages. The Government should issue instructions to Mukaddams and Kutwars for paying special attention to the development of Bari system in their villages.

(d) In Baihar, Niwas and Murwara tehsils where the Baiga have permanently settled down as plough cultivators the problem should be tackled on different lines. The intensity of cultivation should partly be increased through better manuring, irrigation and crop protection measures, and partly by increasing the size of farms through consolidation of holdings and cooperative cropping. Simultaneously efforts should be made to divert tribals towards cottage industries and other non-agricultural occupations.

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* For details see the last portion of the chapter on 'Bewar Cultivation'

Increase in intensity of cultivation

Inspite of all the measures suggested above the problem of land shortage cannot be solved on permanent basis unless an improvement is effected in the methods of land utilisation. Baiga's present agricultural technique is based on the availability of vast tracts of land. As a result, the intensity of cultivation is very low. This increases the demand for land. Therefore, the intensity of cultivation should be raised in all its aspects. Manuring is almost unknown among the hill Baigas. Distant location of the fields, lack of means of transport and Baiga's indifference stand in the way. But these difficulties can be overcome if Baiga's attitude is changed through persuasion. The 'backgarden' cultivation (Bari) which is done on a well-manured plot can be extended further. The Baiga admit that crops on the *bari* are definitely better than those on the *barra* land because of manuring. deeper ploughing (of course with hoe) and proper watering. If the area under *baris* is increased the Baiga will certainly catch the idea of manuring their fields regularly. Their sowing methods also need improvement. At present the aboriginals sow most of the crops by broadcast method irrespective of the kind of the crop, fertility of the soil or area of the field. The sprouting of excessive seeds at a close distance not only brings poor yield but also exhausts the soil sooner. The Baiga should therefore be explained the advantages of methodical sowing. The staff of the Agricultural Department should visit the Baiga villages at the sowing time and demonstrate on Baiga's farms the correct methods of sowing. Some concessions in land revenue may be granted to those who have sown methodically for continuous three years. The Mukaddam, Kutwar and forest guard should be instructed to encourage methodical sowing in their villages. The Forest Department should give special allowance to the forest guards to maintain a demonstration farm on improved lines and educate the aboriginals in improved methods. Baiga sows any kind of seed available at the time of sowing. The results are very well reflected in his poor yield. The taccavi loans have not helped him much. The grain banks suggested later on can render very useful service to the aboriginal. Until such banks are established the forest guard, mukaddam and kutwar may be provided with stock of good seeds to be exchanged with the grain of the aboriginal cultivator at the time of sowing. Since the mukaddam and kutwar reside in the village they can keep a watch on the proper use of the grain so exchanged.

However, the most necessary thing for improving the technique is more ploughs and better ploughs. Many Baigas complained that due to their limited resources they could not afford ploughs and other agricultural implements of the improved type. In fact, Baiga will not be able to make a proper use of manure and good seeds unless his plough is improved. The heavy plough will certainly not suit him for his draught cattle are of very poor breed. There is, however, enough scope for minor improvements which will make material difference in the efficiency of the aboriginal's plough. For example, a spare ploughshare of a little heavier type can be used in lands in the valleys. Besides plough, Baiga also needs improved type of other implements like hoe, harrow, axe, reaping sickle etc. etc. His poor resources, however, do not permit him to buy these. The Government should therefore come forward and help the Baiga cultivator. The proposed grain depots should keep a stock of improved type of agricultural implements and sell them in exchange of agricultural or forest commodities to the aboriginals. For heavier type of agricultural implements the Baiga will, however, need sturdier draught cattle.

Improvement of Cattle breed

The cattle problem of the Baiga land is a difficult one. The Baiga keep a large number of cattle which is beyond their means. The breed is extremely poor. Concentrates are given very rarely. The Veterinary Department has not been successful in extending its operations to the Baiga land because the tract is inaccessible. However, a beginning must be made to improve the situation. The 'Key Village Centre' scheme which is in force in other parts of the State since 1946 should now be extended to the Baiga land. Greater emphasis should, however, be laid on the control of epidemics. More quarantine stations should be opened with a view to forming an effective ring of quarantine stations. A mobile veterinary unit should be established in each division to control epidemics and to assist the meagre local staff in quick and prompt combating of infections. The cattle belonging to professional cattle dealers who move from place to place should be compulsorily vaccinated, and the cattle markets should be checked with a view to detecting and treating infected cattle.

Minor Irrigation Works

An important measure of improvement badly needed in the Baiga land is development of minor irrigation works. At present Baiga does not irrigate his fields nor does he realise the importance of irrigation in agriculture. However, a basis of minor irrigation works already exists in the Baiga land. Big *nullahs* and streams are often dammed by the Baiga for fishing and drinking purposes. In Baihar and Bilaspur tehsils tank irrigation is done in Baiga villages. The Government should undertake a survey of water resources of the region and draw up a scheme of *nullahs* and streams to be dammed at different points. The southern catchment of the Nerbudda saturated by Seoni, Kharmer, Burner, Silgi, Baiyar. Phen and a host of others have fertile silted banks which can be utilised for cultivation for the whole year if the streams are dammed at suitable places. Construction of small dams will not involve much expenditure. The construction material is available locally and the Baiga are already adept in building such dams on smaller scale on cooperative basis. If the Forest Department officials take initiative in the matter no Baiga village will remain without a perennial source of water supply. Of course in the beginning the construction will be of the crudest type, methods of irrigation will be primitive and the volume of water supply will be small; but these simple projects alone will prove practicable in the tribal tracts.

REORGANISATION OF TRIBAL INDUSTRIES

Handicrafts are essential for improving the economic condition of the tribe. It is worthwhile to discuss the basic principles of a new approach towards tribal industries :—

(a) Historical writings show that originally aboriginals living in *isolated villages depended on their own efforts for the* satisfaction of their material wants. As a result, they did not concentrate on one or two crafts for there was no chance for selling the surplus product. Their handicrafts were, thus, of a diversified character and self-sufficiency was the motivating force behind them. Under this order the tribes were not predominantly agricultural communities. There was healthy integration between cultivation and the crafts. This ensured not only a fuller utilisation of local manpower and material, but also released the creative forces in tribal life. Any policy of reviving tribal crafts will be deemed sound and practicable when it retains the diversifying influence of crafts on the tribal economy and also reinforces the motivating force of self-sufficiency. Tribal industries should first aim at satisfying village or regional needs, and thereafter their surplus products could be forwarded to the markets for sale.

(b) In order to expand the volume of employment and increase the tempo of productive activities in the tribal areas, it is essential that the scheme of reorganising cottage industries should make maximum use of the local resources in man and material. Only those industries should be helped in the first instance for which raw material and requisite labour are available in the vicinity, and the products of which can be sold in the nearabout areas without much difficulty or cost. A craft which depends on external sources for the supply of its raw material or the sale of its finished product, will expose the tribal economy to the forces over which the aborigines will have very little control.

(c) Baigas are a simple folk. Their knowledge of modern technology is practically nil. Nor do they have enough capital resources to instal and maintain elaborate mechanical equipment. Therefore only those handicrafts can succeed among the Baiga which are in consonance with the aboriginal's intelligence and resources. Simple handicrafts requiring small capital stand better chances in the tribal areas.

(d) Since Baiga's staying power and knowledge of market conditions are very poor, it will be necessary to protect his interests as a producer as well as petty seller. If Government help makes tribal industries slightly profitable, it will not be surprising if the petty trader and moneylender step into the field and begin to grab a large slice of aboriginal's profit. Aboriginal's interests can be protected in two ways—Craftmen's Cooperatives and direct purchase by the State. Where the tribals are acquainted with cooperative methods the first method may be tried, while the State should come forward as a buyer through its various Departments so that the aboriginal craftsmen may get a fair deal as sellers of their finished products. In the majority of aboriginal villages, in our opinion, State will have to play a vital role in developing tribal industries from production to the consumption end.

(e) Among the old industries, as discussed in the chapter on Tribal Handicrafts, which need reorganisation are : apiculture, collection of medicinal herbs and roots, dairy and cattle breeding, poultry forming, and pig-rearing. Some of the new industries for which the supply of raw materials is locally available, but for which the State will have to provide technical help and initiative are : wood work, hides and skins, hand-made paper, brush making and coffee cultivation.

NEW EXCISE POLICY

All efforts of increasing Baiga's income or his productive efficiency will be in vain if the drain on his purse by way of expenditure on drink and payment of interest on loans is not checked. It is, therefore, necessary to introduce a new excise policy in the tribal areas. Nothing short of a social revolution in tribal life can achieve the objective of prohibition.

A long term programme of nearly twenty years aiming at socio-economic rehabilitation of the aboriginal is a *sine qua non* of a successful attempt at prohibition. If complete prohibition were given effect to all of a sudden, the tribals would not only dislike it but some tribes might even rise in rebellion. A planned programme should, therefore, precede the introduction of prohibition for creating a proper atmosphere for it. The details of such a programme are to be decided by the Excise experts, keeping in view the effects of the past policy, attitude of the aboriginals of the area, accessibility of the area and the prevalent system of excise in a particular area. However, the following broad suggestions deserve consideration :—

In order to undo the harm done by the century old Excise Policy in the tribal areas and to restore the aboriginal's respect for law, and to liquidate the influence of a degraded type of aliens, the outstill system should be abolished in the isolated and inaccessible areas. The aboriginals should be allowed to revert to home-distilling known as the 'handia' system. The Excise Administration should demarcate an area of 'home-distilling' comprising the southern tracts of Amarkantak, South-eastern sector of Dindori tehsil, contiguous area of northern Kawardha, Baihar and Southern part of Mandla tehsil.

A ring of nearly ten miles or more should be demarcated around the 'home-distilling' area where the right to distil should be sold to aboriginals only, not through auction but on cost-cum-commission or salary basis to the individual or to the village as a whole. Excise staff should see that aboriginals are not made tool by the professional contractors and that only bonafide aboriginals make a proper use of such right. To make the area further safe against private contractors, all persons formerly connected with outstill or contract system should be allowed to enter the area by special permit. A clause should be included in the forest contracts that violation of Excise laws in force will be penalised through cancellation of the contract.

A second ring of ten miles or less should be formed around the first in which the system of rationing should be introduced on a liberal basis. Rationing should be introduced by a system of registration. Applications will be made to the licensed vendors in a printed form stating applicant's name, place of residence, age, sex and a declaration that the applicant had not applied for registration or had himself registered in any other shop or area. The tehsil authority will issue permits. A fee of Re. 1/- will be charged to prevent frivolous applications. The licensed vendor will be responsible for observance of the rules regarding proper registration and sale of liquor to bonafide consumers, closing of shops and limit of sale. Each shop will cater for a particular area and population. There will be a uniform ration for every person except in extraordinary cases and it will not be open for a person to buy from or register himself in more than one shop. When ration has been determined, not more than one-fourth of the ration should be allowed to be purchased during one week, and the maximum limit of purchase at any one time should be two bottles. Provision should, however, be made for special and temporary permits. It should be made obligatory upon vendors to keep a place of refreshment where alternative drinks will be provided. Penalty should be provided for the infringement of rationing rules.

Prohibition being the ultimate goal, the Excise Department should consider it one of its important duties to educate the aboriginal population in the benefits of prohibition through propaganda and other persuasive methods. The Department should organise propaganda squads manned by aboriginals who command respect in the society like the Pandas who do not drink. On bazaar days and other festivals special cultural programmes like song and dances, plays and matches, competition in worksmanship and display of achievements of hunting. Baiga School boys should be trained to propagate in their own villages the advantages of checking the evils of drinking. The Forest, Excise and Tribal Welfare Departments should provide recreation facilities as a counter-attraction to the liquor shop on bazaar days and festivals. But care should be taken that the methods employed are not 'alien' to the taste of the aboriginal. They should prove helpful in conserving and developing aboriginal culture, religion and tribal institutions.

Since the execution of the proposed programme will involve reversal of the old one and revolutionary changes in the Excise administration, it will be essential to take stock of the situation periodically and watch the effects of the new policy on the socio-economic condition of the aboriginal. There should be a separate section in the Excise Department which will collect first hand data about Excise and advise the Department regarding the pace, method and areas of prohibition. The propaganda squads should also work under the guidance of this section.

DEBT COMPOSITION AND ABORIGINAL INSOLVENCY ACT

A survey of the debt position of 350 Baiga families revealed that nearly 57 per cent families borrowed loans during the year of investigation. About 54 per cent indebted families owed a debt between Rs. 21 and 120, and 85 per cent of the loans were borrowed for maintenance and seeds. These facts prove the gravity of the situation and call for measures of debt relief at an early date. Suggestions for licensing and regulation of moneylenders have been discussed earlier. Below are discussed schemes of debt composition, aboriginal insolvency legislation and grain banks in the Baiga land :-

Composition of Debt

(i) A period, say six months, should be fixed within which all village moneylenders, *Sahukars*, tribal or non-tribal, pedlers and petty traders who have any claims against members of the scheduled tribes including Baigas in the scheduled areas or other backward tracts to be notified by the State Government for the purpose, should be required by law to submit full particulars of such claims to an authority constituted by law. All debts the particulars of which have not been submitted with the prescribed authority should be declared non-enforceable at law subsequently. Fixation of a period for submitting claims and declaring certain debts time barred will bring concealed deals of *Sahukars* to the surface.

(ii) It is likely the above measure may create nervousness among moneylenders and they may start collecting their outstanding debt even with foul methods. Therefore, it will be necessary to place a moratorium in respect of the principal and arrears of interest—not current interest for the year—pending the decision of the Court on each case.

(iii) Since the aboriginal villages are far away from the district headquarters or tehsil offices and the repeated attendance at the Court would cause inconvenience and financial loss to the aboriginal, it is suggested that a mobile Debt Composition Court (preferably with a local name like Karja Adalat) should be constituted in each tehsil, or if the amout of work is heavy or the area to be covered is extensive, two in each tehsil. These courts will tour the aboriginal tracts and take up the work of composing existing debts in each village.* As far as possible mobile courts should be manned by officials of the rank of Sub-judges who should be men of vision, of sympathetic attitude and practical knowledge of tribal customs and practices. If necessary the court should have the power to consult the elder members of the tribe on general debt position of the village or any individual case. Such consultations should be advisory and not mandatory in nature.

(iv) In the first instance cases of those should be taken up who have a debt of Rs. 100 or above, for this section is in need of immediate help. Later on as circumstances permit and general consciousness is created among the aboriginals about the existence of the mobile courts, other cases may be dealt with.

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*See

1. Report on the Administration of the Central Provinces and Berar.
2. Relief of Indebtedness Act, from July 18th 1939 to December 31st 1940.
3. Opinion of the Nagpur High Court quoted in the above report.
4. The Symington Report p.95.

(v) Simultaneously the court should ascertain the financial condition of each individual debtor through local revenue or forest officers who will supply particulars of the debtor's property, income and the number of dependent members in the debtor's family.

(vi) The aboriginal debtor is completely ignorant of law and he cannot manage for legal advice to defend or to explain his case before the court. In many cases the *Sahukar* enjoys the upperhand in legal matters. Therefore, legal advice should be made available to him at public cost and one or more Government Pleaders should be appointed to represent the debtors at each court. A panel of legal practitioners should be created, the members of which will work at the court by rotation. This will minimise strain upon them and also avoid long absence from their usual places of legal practice.

(vii) The average aboriginal cannot produce any documentary evidence to rebut the contents of the moneylender's documents. Considering his illiteracy, ignorance of law, utter economic dependence upon the *Sahukar* and his mental slavery to his creditor, it will be essential to empower the court to use its discretion regarding the admissibility of oral evidence. When a creditor fails to prove the exact nature of his debt or there is a *prima facie* evidence of conversion of an old debt into a new one, or there is any indication of pleading of service or crop, the debtor should be given relief. The court in such cases should admit oral evidence and a document executed by an illiterate aboriginal should not be regarded *per se* as more reliable than oral evidence of the same transaction. It is obvious from the ways of *mahajans* operating in the aboriginal tracts that any recital in the average document produced by the moneylender is false. A statutory presumption of the falsity of recitals in documents attested by the thumb-marks would compel the creditor to prove what led up to the document. This will shift the burden of proof from the debtor to the creditor. The creditor, then will have to prove that his old debts were legitimately claimed, or included in the new bond, and without this proof the suit should be dismissed. The procedure will compel the *mahajan* to disclose the facts of the case, giving an opportunity to the court to go behind the document and reopen the old transactions underlying it.

(viii) The law should prescribe a schedule of statutory rates of interest on different types of loans and the court should have the power to determine the total interest charges on a particular debt repayable by the debtor.

(ix) The court should make an award of the sum payable by the adjudged debtor and order for the payment of the same in a manner decided by it. If the debtor has sufficient movable property to pay the sum awarded by the court, debt will be recovered from the same. Where the debtor's movable property cannot meet the repayment, the court will decree payment through instalments, the amount and the peroid of which will be decided by the court, keeping in view the debtor's financial position. However, the scheme of instalments must leave sufficient stock of grain for the maintenance of the debtor's family and for seed for the next crop. In order to ensure regular payment of the decreed instalments and to secure the *Sahukar's* position after the composition of his claims, it will be necessary to arrange for the recovery of these instalments through revenue authorities or Forest Department. The debtor thereafter will not be required to have any dealings with the *mahajan*.

(x) Almost the most important measure necessary for the success of the scheme is to prepare the aboriginals psychologically to avail the opportunity of freeing themselves from debt. A campaign of well planned and wide spread effective propaganda will have to be started to acquaint the aboriginals with the provisions of the scheme and to persuade them to give up their mental slavery to the Mahajan and misguided sense of honesty. Some influential aboriginals should specially be appointed to tour their areas and make the scheme fully known to their tribesmen. School masters should be used as publicity agents and squads of propagandists should be created for the purpose. In addition to the publicity through officials of the Revenue and Forest Departments, the scheme should be proclaimed by beat of drum in every village periodically. Some propaganda literature in Hindi and Gondi should be issued to the village *mukaddam* with an instruction to read it out if he is literate or get it read by educated persons visiting the villages.

Aboriginal Insolvency Act

There will remain even after the composition of the existing debts, many cases in which the decreed amount of debt exceeds the value of the aboriginal debtor's movable assets or his present repaying capacity. It means many of the aboriginal debtors are, in fact, insolvent. The Sahukar finances these insolvent aboriginals for he keeps them on a starvation level. Symington rightly remarks about such cases of insolvency, 'But when composition proceedings are in train in respect of these backward tribes I consider that it is incumbent on us to recognise that large numbers of them, whether they plead it or not or even if they deny it, are actually insolvent. In such circumstances they must not be worse treated than the petitioner in bankruptcy, and their liabilities should be strictly scaled down to their capacity for payment'.* The Royal Commission on Agriculture had recognised the need of Simple Rural Insolvency Act even for agriculturists whose repaying capacity is definitely better than that of an aboriginal subsisting partly on roots and tubers and partly on crops raised on poor soil. The Commission remarked, "That there are a large number of hopelessly insolvent debtors in rural areas, is generally admitted, and we cannot regard it as making for health in the body politic that they should be allowed to remain without hope and without help. Legal technicalities must be subordinated to economic interests and, in view of the unsuitability of existing insolvency law (for agriculturists), we recommend that the whole case for a Simple Rural Insolvency Act should be carefully considered in every province. The main objects of such a measure would be to relieve the debtor of what he cannot pay, whilst insisting on his paying the utmost he can within a reasonable time. Just as creditors have the right to insist that all the debtor's assets should be impounded and applied towards the payment of the debts, so also the debtor who has given up all his assets should have the clear right to be allowed to earn his living if he can and to be free to make a new start in life"†. The proposal was later on endorsed by the Central Banking Enquiry Committee and the Sub-Committee on Agricultural Finance‡. A Simple Aborinigal Insolvency Act is, therefore, needed in the State, applicable in the first instance only to the Scheduled Areas for disposing of cases of the hopelessly indebted. Since the aboriginal debtor has no hereditary or transferable rights in land, the adjustment of his debts will depend only on the measure of his repaying capacity. If the fairly adjusted debt exceeds by a given proportion, to be prescribed by law, his total repaying capacity, he should be adjudged as an insolvent to be dealt with compulsorily under Simple Insolvency Act. The procedure under the proposed Act should be made as speedy and inexpensive as possible. However, provision will have to be made for exemption from sale of properties indispensably necessary for the maintenance of the insolvent's family. It is further suggested that after the law has recognised the right of the insolvent 'to be free to make a new start in life', the Government should make provision of proper relief and of proper avenues of employment to such insolvents so that the insolvent debtor may have a chance of economic reçovery.

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* Symington Report, p. 96.

† Report of the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture (Main Report) Pp. 440-441.

‡ See Central Banking Enquiry Committee Report Pp. 66-67. Report of the Sub-Committee on Agricultural Finance—p. 28.

Grain Banks

Composing of existing debts and freeing some debtors of their debt under Insolvency Act may solve the problem only for a short period. For as long as the root causes of indebtedness are present there is every likelihood of the aboriginal falling into mahajan's grip again. Moreover as a result of the suggested restrictions on moneylending, the credit facilities will decrease in the backward areas. The aboriginal will naturally look to alternative source of credit for working capital It is, therefore, necessary to create a substitute in place of the *Sahukar* to perform on fair terms practically the same functions as are now performed by the latter on unfair terms. The scheme may be briefly outlined as follows :—

Semi-Cooperative organisations known as Grain Banks (Vernacular —Anaj Bank) should be set up at convenient centres covering all the villages within a radius of 20 miles. The proposed bank should be a combination of Purchase and Sale Society and Grain Depots. It should grant loans to individual applicants in small sums preferably in kind to meet the aboriginals' requirements as they arise. In some cases the bank may also advance loans for ceremonial purposes. But every care will have to be taken by the bank to see that the cash advances are spent for the purposes for which they were granted. As Purchase and Sale Society, the Bank should take over its member's crops for sale at fair price payable in the shape of seed, groceries, cloth and other requisities.

The Bank should prepare credit statements of all the applicants on the data of their holdings, average produce, size of the family and the amount of indebtedness. Village officers should help the Bank in this work by supplying information. Loans may then be granted on the security of certain percentage of the coming harvest.

The Banks should open Grain Depots in important villages and in a group of 5 to 10 minor villages where the bank's borrowers should bring their mortgaged crops. Even those who had not taken any advance from the bank should be encouraged to deposit their grains in the Depot and arrangements should be made for grain withdrawals by the depositors. Some stock of important necessaries like salt, oil, cloth and *gur* should also be kept at important places to be sold for the grain deposited by the non-members.

The village officers should be made responsible for the recovery of loans, and to enforce that the borrowers bring their produce to the Depot. It should be the duty of Revenue authorities and in forest villages of officers of the Forest Department to prevent the unlawful removal of crops by or for the benefit of outside persons.

The management of the Bank and the authority to grant loans should vest in officers of the Government. However, an advisory body should be set-up consisting of local aboriginals of influence to advise the officer on the location of Grain Depots, purchase and sale policy and the quality of goods to be supplied to the people. Each Depot should be managed by an accountant who will record all the transactions effected at the Depot and act as a link between the Bank and the Depot. The management and direction of the whole scheme should be the duty of the Provincial Cooperative Department and its subordinate agencies. The Government should, however, supply finance for the whole scheme and make all advances granted under it as advances recoverable under 'Provincial loans and advances'. The following chart shows the organisational structure of the proposed scheme :—

State Government should sponsor
and finance the scheme

State Cooperative Department should
direct and manage the scheme

District Cooperative Banks should
supervise and coordinate the activities of Central Grain Banks at
Mandla Bilaspur Balaghat Jabalpur
and other suitable places.

Primary Grain Banks in important villages should
advance loans in cash and kind on the security of next harvest;
and also purchase and sell others agricultural produce ;
should recover loans through Grain Depots.

Grain Depots in big villages
or in a radius of 10 miles
should
collect repayments by borrowers in the shape of grain, and
also re-issue such grain to aboriginals, and supply consumer
goods to aboriginals.

It must, however, be clearly understood that the future of the proposed scheme will largely depend on the scope and the speed of execution of a comprehensive scheme of socio-economic rehabilitation of the tribe as a whole. For ultimately the financial position of the population among which the Bank is proposed to operate, will decide the success of the scheme. No Government can finance any scheme for an indefinite period. Ultimately the Banks must be financed and managed by the aboriginals themselves. The final target should be to hand over Banks to the aboriginals of the area. Measures should, therefore, be taken simultaneously to bring about a substantial increase in the aboriginal's income, his standard of living should be raised, and he should be lifted out of the abyss of disease and illiteracy.

EDUCATION

The problem of tribal education is a complex one and yet the future of the aborigines will largely depend upon the type of education they receive and the speed with which they make progress in this direction. Unfortunately the educational authorities and other agencies of the State have not evolved any scientific system of education bearing 'aboriginal bias'. Education being the vital aspect of tribal welfare should receive special attention of the Government. A committee of educationists, anthropologists, social workers and aboriginal leaders should be appointed to investigate the whole question and draw up a plan suited to needs and traditions of the tribals. Some of the problems of aboriginal education and solutions thereof, which deserve consideration of the proposed expert committee, are mentioned below :—

Aboriginal education to justify itself must 'conserve and develop aboriginal culture, religion and tribal institutions'. It should reaffirm aboriginal's faith in his culture and give him courage to 'defend himself against those elements of civilisation that threaten to destroy or impoverish him'. Simultaneously it should enable him to carve out a place for himself in modern society and enrich it with his special contribution. From a utilitarian point of view, schooling must improve his income and standard of living. After leaving the school he should not find himself a misfit in his own environment, but an active, faithful and earning member of the tribe.*

The existing system of education will have to be changed to fulfil these aims. The system of Basic education seems to be the best for aboriginals. A craft should be the basis of the curriculum. But it must be related to aboriginal life and the aboriginals should be able to follow it with advantage in after years. Carpentry, woodcarving, bamboo work, making of ropes and fish traps, and garden cultivation are some of the crafts whose potentialities as a basic craft may be investigated for educational purposes. A special series of readers should be produced in aboriginal languages and it should contain songs, riddles and stories about tribal life, history and culture. Tribal games and dances should be described and illustrated in them. In order to widen the aboriginal's

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* See Elwin : 'Loss of Nerve' p. 27 and his Note to W. V. Grigson quoted in 'The Aboriginal Problem in C. P. & Berar' Pp. 399-407.

Aboriginals taking medicine from the Mobile Hospital of Banvasi Sewa Mandal, Chhindwara.

Baiga and other aboriginal School boys and girls of the Primary School at Adwar.

outlook and make him realise that he is a part of the nation, some lessons on national heroes, Indian culture and history should also be included in the text books meant for the aboriginal boys.

As regards the medium of education in aboriginal schools, there are two opinions among the aboriginals themselves. Some aboriginals think that the main purpose of sending their children to schools is that they will learn the bazaar language which will help them in dealing with the moneylender, the shopkeeper, the patwari and the petty official. There are others who want the teacher to give their children their first lessons in their own language so that they may continue to practise their own songs and keep in touch with their own tribal folklore and history in their own language The problem of language will resolve itself to some extent when in schools emphasis is shifted from books to the basic craft, for the technique of craft will have to be explained first in an aboriginal language. Further, when there is increase in the number of aboriginal teachers as is proposed later on, the existing gulf of language between the teacher and the taught will shorten of its own accord. Even then, it will be necessary to produce books in aboriginal languages for the primary standard. To acquaint the boys of primary classes with regional language the teacher should teach them through conversation and story telling. However, in higher classes some Hindi books should be made compulsory.

Festivals and ceremonies are the vital part of aboriginal life. A Baiga boy will hardly feel at home in the school if the school environment does not permit him to play, dance and sing. Unfortunately the urban-minded teachers regard themselves and their culture as infinitely superior to that of 'savages' among whom they have to live. This attitude must be changed. Tribal festivals, ceremonies, games and recreation, songs and dances, feasts and holidays should form the basis of the cultural and social life of the school, and through them the village schools could do a good service by spreading the knowledge of different dances, drum rhythms. tunes and songs from place to place. A handbook of aboriginal games may be prepared with illustrations. and circulated inter-regionally. School boys should also organise functions of national importance in their own village or at fairs, and thereby make the aboriginal familiar with national culture.

The timetable of aboriginal schools should be adapted to local conditions and customs. In the villages where the guardians are opposed to sending their wards to the school due to economic reasons, the time of the school should be so adjusted as to leave at least half time in which boys may help their parents in their occupations. Particularly in girls schools the students should be given an opportunity of doing some domestic work. The schools should remain closed on bazaar days, festivals, religious worship and other important occasions. Instead of closing schools during the summer, it is better to suspend teaching during the sowing and reaping seasons. Each region should have its own list of school holidays based on local customs and the type of population living in the region.

School buildings should be in the aboriginal style, cheap and simple mud-huts yet clean and suggestive. These should be located as far as possible on hill-tops or river banks where boys have unrestricted opportunity for playing game and celebrating festivals. Two School hostels in every tehsil is the immediate need of the aboriginal areas, for it is in these hostels that new leaders for tribal welfare work can be trained on sound lines. Responsible and elderly aboriginals may be associated with the management of the hostels, but the primary responsibility of maintaining these hostels should rest upon the Government.

The proper type of teacher is the most important factor in giving 'aboriginal bias' to education in tribal areas. The existing divorce of feeling between the teacher and taught can best be removed by securing that teachers in aboriginal areas belong to aboriginal communities and understand the tribal language. A special training school for aboriginal teachers should be opened in the Baiga region with adequate numbers of Baiga children available for practising classes. The best site for this school would be Dhurkatta—the seat of the Baiga tribe in the South of Dindori. The institution need not be housed in big *pucca* buildings, but in mud houses on the lines of improved village houses, so that the institution may in itself teach trainees already familiar with village house-building what can be done with the use of the same materials and methods to improve ventilation, drainage and cleanliness. The teachers should make a special study of the problems of aboriginal education, its technique and psychology, organisation and administration and knowledge and practice of aboriginal crafts. Provision should also be made for education in elementary principles of anthropology and problems of culture-contact. In a nutshell, the new teacher should be able not only to teach three R's, but act as a friend, philosopher and guide of the tribal community. It is for the teacher to revive the aboriginals' faith in their culture, assert their place in national life and persuade them to give their best to the nation.

Since the education of the aboriginal needs a new approach, affects the most backward section of the society and requires extra-expenditure, the State Government should undertake the sole responsibility for it.

A special department of Aboriginal Education should be created for the purpose. Besides organising and administering institutions in the aboriginal areas, it should also arrange for the training of aboriginal teachers and carry out research and experiments in methods of aboriginal education and the problems connected with them. To make sure that educational schemes to be introduced in the tribal areas are sound, the Department should constantly take advice of educationists, anthropologists, social workers and tribal leaders who may be associated with the Department on a permanent basis. The advice of the anthropologist is of considerable importance in this sphere for he can be the best guide on the probable effects of culture-contact on tribal life which is a direct consequence of education. Whether education should be made compulsory in a particular area should be decided by the anthropologists concerned.

MEDICAL AID

Defective personal hygiene, adverse climatic factors and nutritional deficiency being the main causes of diseases in the aboriginal areas, preventive measures will bring better and more permanent results than curative medicines. Hence in any scheme of medical relief of these areas *greater emphasis should be on the preventive measures.* Secondly, the aboriginals have their own *traditional system of curing disease* based partly on magic and partly on herbal treatment. Any medical system to be cheap and acceptable to the aboriginal must not overlook his system altogether. Tribal prescriptions which appear to be scientific should be absorbed in the modern system and further researches be made in them. A research laboratory should be opened for this purpose at some important tribal centre and the reputed aboriginal medicinemen be associated with it in order to study the diseases of aboriginals and their own methods of curing them. Thirdly, inaccessibility of modern medical aid, its high cost and its dispensation by those who look down upon the aboriginals have made the aboriginal indifferent owards modern medical arrangements. To break this indifference and develop a correct attitude in him towards medical arrangements, it will for sometime be *necessary to take medical aid to the aboriginal's door steps.* This will also convince the aboriginals of State's sincerity and ensure continuity in the treatment of cases of illness. Such relief should reach the aboriginal in a form and manner and through persons who do not appear absolutely as 'alien' in the aboriginal areas. And lastly, the programme of *medical relief should be a part of the general programme of uplift.* After all, better diet, improved personal and environmental hygiene and economic security are the foundations of good health, and all these cannot be brought into existence without a planned programme of economic betterment of the tribal people.

A *nutritional survey* of aboriginal areas seems to be an essential requisite for effective planning of public health work and aboriginal diet. Medical experts have hardly any knowledge of the nutritive contents of coarse grains and millets, which the aboriginals use everyday. Nor is any analysis available of the food value of forest fruits, roots and tubers eaten by the forest tribes. The 'deficiency diseases' can neither be diagnosed nor prevented in the absence of scientific analysis of aboriginal diet. It is, therefore, suggested that the Public Health Department should undertake a nutritional survey of typical aboriginal areas and place its results before medical men practising in the tribal areas.

Among diseases *Malaria* is the worst enemy of the aboriginal. Malarial fever is not only in itself a cause of death but also renders its victim vulnerable to other diseases. Once the vitality of the patient is sapped out, or his spleen is enlarged, he is exposed to a number of diseases. The control of malaria should, therefore, be the corner stone of any scheme of medical relief. The Government should organise a well planned campaign against malaria through a special Malaria branch of the Public Health Department in collaboration with other Departments like Forest, Excise, Education, Revenue and Police. The Department should train an anti-malarial service which will be entrusted with this work and given sole responsibility. Details of anti-malarial operations are a matter for the expert to decide, but the proposed special branch should discharge mainly three functions: Undertake malarial surveys, train the aboriginals in anti-malarial measures and actually execute the anti-malarial plans in cooperation with the villagers. Experiment in groups of villages should be carried out and the practical results shown to the villagers. Aboriginal school boys should also be imparted elementary instruction in public health, supported by controlled experiments in anti-malarial measures. They should be trained in the draining of stagnant pools, the canalisation of *nullahs* in the immediate surroundings of the village, and deliberate fouling with cattle dung of all collections of water which cannot be drained and which are not used for human drinking purposes. Spraying of insecticides and distribution of quinine in villages will go a long way in allaying the curse.

The high incidence of *skin diseases* and sometimes of venereal diseases are due to defective *personal hygiene*. Baigas are not in the habit of bathing daily nor of washing their clothes. Wherever they have taken to shirt and full dhoti, their infrequent bathing and washing further aggravate skin diseases. They are also not aware of sex hygiene which is responsible at times for infections. In villages having schools the teacher. and in forest villages the forest guard, should try to develop habits of personal cleanliness and good environmental sanitation among the tribals.

Water supply is a major problem in the Baiga region. Nearly everywhere the wells dry up in summer because there is so much hard rock, especially near Baiga villages situated on hill tops or ridges. Then nearly every village has three or four *tolas* (hamlets), and a *tola* may be two to three miles from the main *abadi*. But there is a silver lining to this difficult situation. Almost everywhere in the Baiga region there are perennial streams or springs near about the village. It is, therefore, a question largely of proper site for wells. The State should undertake a detailed survey of the number of wells, of village requirements, of streams, springs and sub-soil water level, and of tanks in the aboriginal areas in order of urgency and availability of constructional material locally. The Government should see that during the next five years every aboriginal village should have reasonably safe water supply.

For the successful organisation of medical relief in aboriginal areas the Government should train a *special medical staff*. The doctors of the areas should besides possessing knowledge of modern medicine must also know the special problems connected with the health and disease of the aboriginals. They should be men of sympathy and compassion for the simple and ignorant tribals. In addition, the doctors should themselves possess robust health to stand the effects of forest climate and face the rigours of inaccessible and isolated tracts. The Public Health Department should open centres in tribal tracts for training doctors for this purpose. Doctors who have a long experience of tribal people should be deputed to train new doctors. Wherever possible the training centre should also function as a nucleus of research in aboriginal diseases and system of medicine.

The medical facilities are extremely inadequate in the Baiga land. Therefore, more dispensaries should be opened at important market places and bigger villages. Since Baigas live far away from the main tracts, it will be necessary to organise some mobile dispensaries which will visit the defined number of villages according to a schedule made known to the villagers in advance. Wherever possible some Baigas should be associated with such dispensaries so that the tribals may feel familiar with the staff and take fullest advantage of the facility. As the incidence of the skin, respiratory and venereal diseases is high among the aboriginals, special arrangements should be made for curing these diseases. The specialists should devise ways and means for bringing medicines within the means of the poor aboriginal. Similarly, child mortality being very high, arrangements should be made for training aboriginal midwives who will at least be available at the time of complications in delivery.

The above ameliorative measures are not claimed as a blue print for the rehabilitation of the tribe. The administrator, social reformer and technical experts have to come forward for drawing up a detailed plan of development of the Baiga land. Author's suggestions only indicate the urgency of certain problems and the broad outlines of their solution. But the most important thing which, in author's opinion, deserves the greatest emphasis is the need of a new approach to the tribal people. No amount of developmental effort will bring a ray of hope to the aboriginals if we go to them with an air of superiority, to tell them how to do and try to make them a second rate copy of ourselves. The spirit of correct approach can be best described in the words of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, "The approach to the tribal people should be one of learning from them and having learnt to try to help and cooperate. There is a very great deal to learn from them......... They are extremely desciplined people, often much more democratic than most others in India.........What we ought to do is not merely to put up a school building but some how to develop a sense of oneness with these people, a sense of unity and understanding. That involves a psychological approach ......If you approach the tribal people with affection, go to them as liberating force and as a friend so that they may feel you have come not to take away something from them but to give them something, that is the right way of integration. But if they feel you have come to impose yourself, to interfere and come in their way, to try to change their methods of living, to take away their land, to push some of your businessmen there who will exploit them, then it is all completely wrong.........One had always to keep in view the fact that we are going there not to interfere with their way of life but to help them live it.*

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*Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's speech at the First Tribal Welfare Conference held in Delhi on the 7th June 1952 (Brochure issued by the Government of India, Pp. 15-19)

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Appendix No. 2.

STATEMENT OF VILLAGES AND NUMBER OF FAMILIES SURVEYED.

1952.

Region	Name of the village visited	Number of Baigas surveyed in the village	Number of Baiga families surveyed in the village.
Baiga Chak	Jhilon	126	21
	Dhaba	17	3
	Ajgartola	101	14
	Dharkutta	200	24
	Tantar	74	9
	Silpuri	140	20
Dindori Tehsil	Ladwani	22	3
	Sarai	38	5
	Basania	12	3
	Ufri	13	5
	Khamaria	10	2
	Piparia	62	10
	Dhalitola	25	5
	Kharaitola	15	4
	Jalda	66	10
	Chapmar	10	2
	Kanhari	17	3
	Chara	43	5
Mandla Tehsil	Khatia	44	9
	Indri	88	10
	Kanha	56	12
	Sonph	72	10
	Bhilwani	71	6
	Saliwara	15	3
	Khalondi	11	3
	Ghuitola	59	7
	Chandgaon	42	8
Mungeli Tehsil	Maradabra	62	11
	Chakmak	45	9
	Ladra	160	28
	Tingadda	29	4
Kawardha Tehsil	Baghmara	23	6
	Kasai Kunda	55	14
	Hadi	36	7
Baihar Tehsil	Adwar	57	8
	Aurai	14	3
	Ghorila	11	2
	Samnapur	28	7
	Dudhania	61	8
	Sondhar	52	10
	Kaloldih	40	7
	Jholar	70	10
Grand Total	42	2,192	350

Appendix No. 3.

STATEMENT OF AGRICULTURAL PRICES PREVAILING IN THE MARKETS OF BAIGALAND IN 1952.

(Price Per Rupee)

Commodity	Dindori Market	Mandla Market	Mungeli Market	Kawardha Market	Baihar Market
	Seers	Seers	Seers	Seers	Seers
Kodon	4	3½	4	4	4
Kutki	4	3½	4	4	4
Paddy	7½	6½	7½	7½	7½
Rai	2½	2	2½	—	—
Maize	4	4	4	4	4
Wheat	3¼	3	—	—	3
Grain	3¼	3	—	—	3
Til	2¼	2½	2½	—	—
Ahrar	2½	2½	2½	—	—
Juar	4¼	4	3	—	3
Ramtilla	2¼	2¼	2½	—	—

Note : Prices of only those crops are given which are commonly produced in respective regions.

Appendix No. 4.

ECONOMIC CALENDAR OF BAIGA REGION.

Name of Month		Economic Calendar	
English	Local	Rabi Tract	Kharif Tract
May-June	Jeth	Burning trees, ploughing with *bakhar*, levelling fields. Hunting and Fishing. Repairing houses and storing of fodder.	Hunting and Fishing Repairing Houses. Storing fodder for rainy season.
June-July	Ashar	Ploughing fields, sowing rice, maize, bean, pumpkins in baree. Collecting green leaves and digging out roots.	Ploughing fields, sowing maize, pumpkins and beans in baree, collecting green leaves and digging out roots.
July-August	Sawan	Transplantation of rice or biasi operation. First weeding starts. Collecting fruits and roots from the forest.	Not much work. Collecting roots and fruits from the forest.
August-September	Bhadon	Second weeding. Early variety of rice begins to ripe. Some agricultural festivals fall in this month.	Busy in repairing agricultural implements.
September-October	Kunwar	Early variety of rice and millet are cut, threshed and stored.	Millets are cut, threshed and grain stored.
October-November	Katik	Rice is cut, threshed and grain stored.	Ploughing and sowing of kharif crops. Busy month in Kharif area.
November-December	Aghan	Storing of the new grain. Many festivals.	Many festivals.
December-January	Poush	Dancing season. Lighting fires for warmth.	Lighting fires for warmth. Winter festivals.

Contd.

Name of Month		Economic Calendar	
English	Local	Rabi Tract	Kharif Tract
January-February	Magh	Ploughing, fields Hunting and trapping.	Mostly watching ripening wheat and gram in the fields.
February-March	Phagun	Fishing and hunting.	Kharif crop ready, cutting of the crop begins.
March-April	Chait	Clearing land for cultivation. Manuring of the rice fields. Marriage season.	Busy gathering Kharif crop, threshing winnowing and finally storing the grain. Marriage season.
April-May	Baisakh	Manuring the fields. Repairing the 'bunds' and levelling the fields. Hunting fishing.	Repairing the 'bunds' or fields. Hunting and fishing.

(Based on 'Gondwana and the Gonds' by Indrajit Singh.)

Appendix No. 5.

A LIST OF BAIGA'S HOUSEHOLD POSSESSIONS

For cooking and dining

Talai	...	Frying pan
Duksa	...	Earthen frying pan
Paina	...	Small earthen cooking pot
Ghiti Paseni	...	Sieve or tray
Chatwa	...	Wooden spoon
Handi	...	Earthen pot
Tahela	...	Earthen basin
Patri	...	Leaf plate
Dona	...	Leaf cup
Thali	...	Tray
Musal	...	Used for threshing

Baskets, Ropes and Furniture

Mora	...	A basket
Tokni	...	-do-
Gudri	...	-do-
Garwa	...	Rope
Kanwar	...	A device for carrying load on shoulders
Seehri	...	Basket for carrying load
Bahuga	...	A variance of Kanwar
Machi	...	Cot
Peeda	...	A stool for sitting
Sarki chatai	...	Mat
Chapi	...	Basket
Jhunrar	...	Basket
Chapa	...	Bigger basket
Jharu	...	Brush for cleaning
Jhopi	...	A kind of basket

Taraju	...	Weighing scale
Chitri	...	An umbrella made of leaves & bamboo
Tuma	...	Gourd used as spoon
Supa	...	Winnowing fan
Kaudi	...	A basket

Petla accessories

Petla	...	A wooden machine for squeezing oil
Genda	...	Lower part of petla
Thali	...	Dish for receiving oil
Chukaria	...	An earthenware for storing oil seeds
Tumbi	...	Gourd for storing oil

Articles of personal decoration, dance and dress

Jhali	...	An article of decoration used on head
Kalangi	...	A bunch of feathers tucked in headdress
Tiski	...	Wooden clappers
Chatkulia	...	Toe-rings
Havel	...	A neck ornament of coins
Sutia	..	A silver tore horn round the neck
Kankan	...	A bracelet
Tarkulia	...	An ornament
Paijan	...	Anklets which make sound
Kori	...	Shell
Kakai	...	Comb
Latkan	...	Ear ring
Shutia	...	An ornament
Langoti	...	A small strip of cloth tied between the legs
Kapra	...	Cloth wrapped by women
Pagri	...	Headdress
Gadli	...	Bedding
Pichori	...	A covering for winter season

Foodgrains & Pulses

Kodon	...	Coarse grain
Kutki chahtahi	...	Coarse grain

Baigani kutki	...	Coarse grain
Jhurnu	...	Coarse grain
Urad	...	Pulse
Barbati	...	Pulse
Makka	...	Maize
Kong	...	Wild grain
Madia	...	Coarse grain
Arhar	...	Pulse
Bajra	...	Coarse grain
Dhan	...	Paddy
Mundi	...	Wheat
Chana	...	Gram
Masri	...	Pulse
Batra	...	Mixed coarse grain
Navri	...	Coarse grain

Oilseeds

Ramtilla
Rai
Til
Gulli
Arandi

Spices

Dhana
Haldi
Mirchi
Bakra Masla
Baigani Masala
Pyaj
Lahsun
Nimak

Agricultural Implements

Nagar	... Plough
Jua	... Yoke
Datri	... Sickle
Tangiya	... Small axe
Kulhari	... Big axe
Hansia	... Sickle
Khanta	... Digging hoe
Fwara	... For turning over earth
Bakkhar	... Harrow
Farsa	... A big axe with long and sharp edge

Weapons of Hunting and fishing

Suri	... Spikes for killing animal
Barchi	... Spear with wooden handle
Sang	... Spear
Bisar	... A poisoned arrow
Dhanush	... Bow
Tir	... Arrow
Talwar	... Sword
Mahur	... A poison
Khujji	... A trap for catching wild fowls
Choup	... Sticky material for khujji
Thonga	... A trap
Tanga	... A trap made of jute
Bansi	... A wire used in fishing
Mora and chulna	... Baskets for emptying a pond
Jhitka	... Bamboo trap for catching fish
Jhimar	... Bamboo trap for catching fish

Appendix No. 6

LIST OF FOREST PRODUCTS

(a) Fruits and Seeds

achar	*Buchanania lanzan.*
aonla	*Emblica officinalis.*
apta	*Bauhinia racemosa.*
bael	*Aegle marmelos.*
Bans, bamboo	*Dendrocalamus strictus.*
ber	*Zizyphus jujuba.*
churna	*Zizyphus rugosa.*
dokarbel	*Vitis latifolia.*
ghogar	*Garuga pinnata.*
imli	*Tamarindus indica.*
iruni	*Zizyphus osnoplia.*
jamun	*Eugenia cumini.*
jaria ber	*Zizyphus rotundifolia.*
kala phetra	*Randis uliginasa.*
karonda	*Carissa spinarum.*
katang-bans	*Bambusa arundinacea.*
kawit	*Feronia elephantum.*
kulu	*Sterculia urens.*
kuram	*Leea aspera.*
kusum	*Schlcichera oleosa.*
mahua	*Madhuca latifolia.*
munga	*Moringa oleifara.*
nimboo	*Citrus medica.*
phetra	*Gardenia turgida.*
tendu	*Diospyros melanoxylon.*

(b) Flowers

kachnar	*Bauhinia variegata.*
mahua	*Madhuca latifolia.*
semal	*Bombax malabaricum.*

(c) Leaves and leaf galls

amta	... *Bauhinia malabarica.*
khatua	... *Vitis auriculata.*
kuram	... *Leea aspera.*
neem	... *Azadirachta indica.*
koila	... *Bauhinia purpurea.*

(d) Bark

datranga	... *Ehretia laevis.*

(e) Stems

harjuri	... *Vitis quadrangularis*
khatua	... *Vitis auriculata.*

(f) Roots

baichandi	... *Dioscorea daemona.*
khatua	... *Leea aspera.*
gumchi	... *Abrus precatorius.*
musalkand, suarkand	... *Dioscorea pentaphylla.*
satawati	... *Asparagus spp.*

SHIFTING CULTIVATION IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES AND INDIA

Shifting cultivation is practised, with some variations, throughout the tropical and sub-tropical regions of the world. It is known by various names in different countries. The primitive cultivators of West Africa call it 'farming', and it is known as 'Sartage' in the French and Belgian Ardennes. It goes by the name of 'Koholo' among the natives of South-East Solomon Islands. The Vedda of Ceylon call it 'Chena' and the Burmese hill tribes as 'Taungya'. While in our country among the Bhuiya of Orissa it is known as 'dabi' and 'komon', among the Marias of Bastar as 'Penda', among the Assam hill tribes as 'Jhum', among Khond as 'podu' and 'beora' among the Pahari Korwa of Jashpur area. Although shifting cultivation is known, as we have seen, by different names, except with slight variations, it is similar in its fundamentals throughout the areas where it is practised. The clearing of forest or undergrowth, and firing of the cuttings is common. Soil is not turned up with plough, and seeds are either broadcast or sown into dribbled holes. Usually two or three crops are raised on such plots and thereafter a new plot is chosen. The following description of shifting cultivation of different countries bring out the fundamentals of the system.

Africa

Shifting cultivation is not a speciality of Indian primitive tribes. It is a stage in the evolution of agricultural technique and precedes plough cultivation. Wherever topographic, climatic and socio-economic forces have not favoured technological progress in agriculture, shifting cultivation or patch agriculture persists. It is, therefore, not surprising that the practice is found in one or the other form throughout the world. The 'farming' system of West Africa is a typical example of shifting cultivation. The Yoruba of *Congo Basin* are shifting cultivators. To prepare new plots in the forest belt, trees and bush are felled during the later rains and the short dry period, while in the more open country to the north the grass is burnt off in the dry season. Land can be farmed for longer periods in the forest belt where the same plot is tilled for two periods of five or six years, with a two or three year interval of fallow between. After that it is abondoned and will not be used for cultivation for another twenty years. But on a grassland the plot can be brought into use after about four or five years. The *Boloki Highlander* of the Congo Basin living at a height of about twelve hundred feet above sea-level, clear the heavy trees with a wedge-shaped iron axe and gather together and dried vegetation towards the end of the drier season so that it may be burned to provide fertilising ashes. Plots are exhausted after about four years and now clearings have to be made. Land can be cleared freely by all villagers within the tribal territory and effective occupation is the only valid title to land.

The *Bemba of North-Eastern Rhodesia* follow a shifting system of cultivation. They make gardens by lopping off the branches of the trees according to the characteristic citemene system, this type of tree cutting being the centre of the most important religious ceremonies of the year. The piled-up branches are then fired, and seeds are sown in the patch of ashes thus formed. Weeds are thus burned, and no further hoeing is needed during the year. Gardens once made are planted for four or five years according to a definite system of rotation of crops.*

The *Yao of Southern Nyasaland* follow the slash-and-burn type of cultivation common in Central Africa. The area which is to be a new garden is prepared by cutting out the timber in it. Larger trees are pollarded and the branches filled round the trunks. Brushwood and smaller branches are collected in heaps throughout the clearing. When these are dry they are burned, usually just before the rainy season, i.e. about September-October. The ash and soil is then hoed into elongated ridges along which the grain is planted. In the second and subsequent years the stalks from previous year together with all the weeds and other brush collected from the garden are filed into heaps and burned as before. Such Gardens are cultivated for many years, some certainly for more than five. If necessary, gardens are increased each year by cutting new timber. Villages seem to be fairly well fixed, some of them having been in their present sites for thirty years and more.†

"The rural economy of the *Southern Nigeria* is still dominated by the cultivation of root crops for food under a system of bush fallowing. Less than forty years ago the proportion of land actually under cultivation in most districts over this vast area was very low, in most parts farms were temporary clearings in the forest and a short spell of one or two years of cultivation on any plot was followed by a long period of rest in which secondary forest grew up on the land again. There are still substantial areas, as for example on the western borders in Yoruba country, in part of Benin and Warri provinces and in eastern part of Colabor and Ogoja provinces, where these conditions persist."‡

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* **Elizabeth Colson and Max Cluckman : 'Seven Tribes of British Central Africa', Pp 167.**

† **Elizabeth Colson and Max Gluckman : Op. Cit. Pp. 301.**

‡ **Daryll Forde : 'The Native Economics of Nigeria', Pp. 40.**

The *Malasian of Solomon Islands* also clear their Yam plots by burning undergrowth. New plots are cleaned in the months of July and August. The bigger trees are ringed and barked and left standing so that the Yam vines may climb up the dead trunk and branches. The whole garden often measures well over a hundred yards in each direction. After the drier weather of September and October the cut undergrowth of the intended garden is burnt, and its ashes provide the only fertiliser applied to the soil. Each plot is then raked clear to await the planting in November and early December. After one or sometimes two crops of Yams a garden is allowed to recoup to bush, although bananas and fruit trees may be planted in it. But the vegetation does not grow up as densely as on virgin ground and after eight or ten years it will usually come into cultivation again.*

South America

When the *Boro of the Western Amazon Forest* make a new patch of cultivation, the larger trees are felled by burning and the small growth hacked down with stone axes at the end of wetter season. The tree stumps left on a clearing soon decay or are reduced by the swarms of ants. When the rains have slackened the undergrowth and creepers are burned out by starting a number of fires. The ground is then roughly broken by the men with heavy wooden stakes and clubs, and in this wilderness of charred trunks and uneven ground the women go out in parties to plant the crop with simple digging sticks. Cultivated ground is, however, exhausted after only two or three harvests and a new plot must then be cleared.† Patch agriculture is practised by the *Bakairi Indians of the Upper Xingu* region in South America. "First of all, the undergrowth and low thicket were cut down. Then the individual trees were notched so as to determine the direction in which they would fall. Lastly, one large tree on the edge of the area was felled. In its fall this tree knocked down the trees immediately adjacent to it, these in turn brought down those next to them, so that the whole section fell together with one prolonged crash. The fallen trees are left for months in the dry season and when they have dried up fire is kindled throughout the area. All the brushwood and branches are burned and the charred trunks are left on the ground. The soil is neither hoed nor worked in any way, but at the beginning of the rainy season holes for the seeds or cuttings

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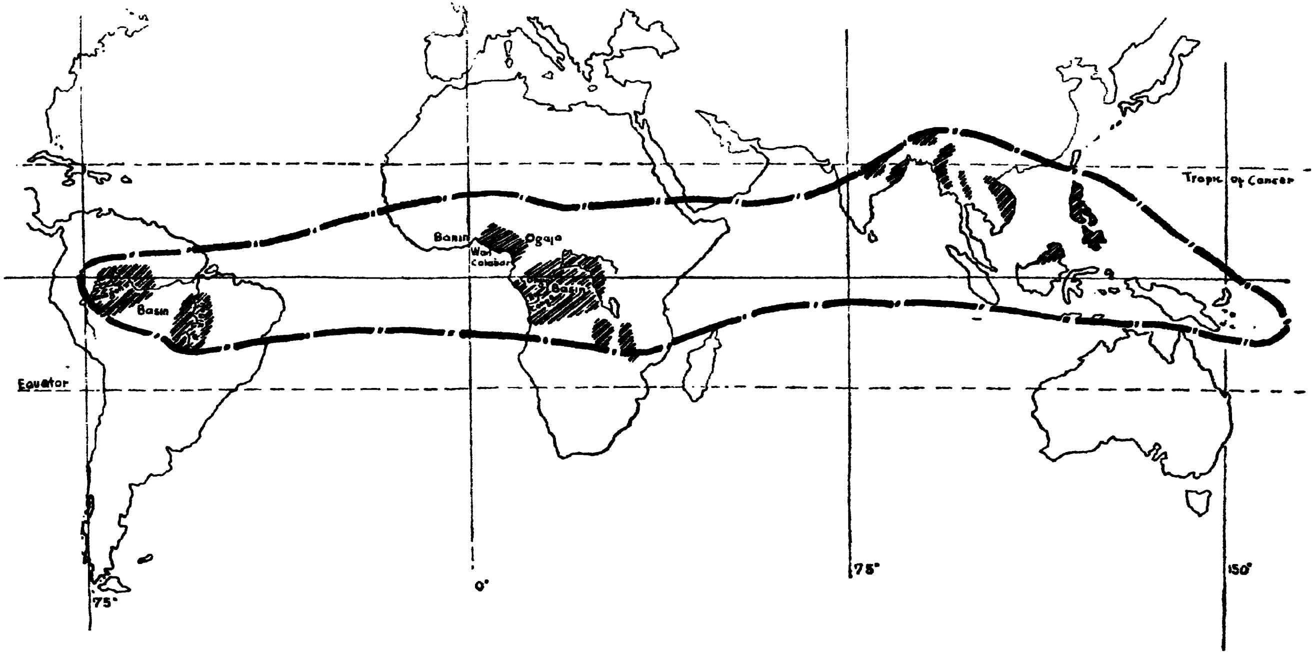
* Daryll Forde : op. cit. p. 189 also Iveno : **Malanesians of the South east Solomon Islands** p. 355.

† Daryll Forde : op. cit. p. 136.



▨ Areas of Shifting Cultivation.

Map of the World indicating the Regions of Shifting Cultivation.

are made, and the earth surrounding them is slightly loosened with a pointed 'planting-stick' or dibbles.'*

North Borneo, Indo-China, Burma & Ceylon.

The hill tribes of *British North Borneo* raise the rice crop on plots cleared and burnt in dense forests. Every year they fire new plots and after exhausting the forest land near about the village they shift to some other site. In *Indo-China*, the Moi burn forest plots on communal basis by the end of April and sow seeds in ashes after the first rains. Shifting cultivation is widely practised in the hill regions of *Burma* where it is known as Taungya cultivation. In principle it resembles shifting cultivation with a difference taht the occupant is given a plot on a condition by the Forest Department that he plants out young forest trees, or sows the seed, in such a manner and in such a year of the lease as may be laid down by the forest officer. Thus, when the land is vacated by the agriculturist a young forest crop of trees remains in *Situ.*† The Veddah of *Ceylon* also carry on this system of cultivation over a considerable area. They call it Chena. The patch agriculture without draught animals provides sustenance to millions in the East Indies, in the Philipines and other Pacific Islands.‡

SHIFTING CULTIVATION IN INDIA.

India's tribal tracts are a part of the shifting cultivation belt which girdles tropical or sub tropical countries. There is enough evidence which proves that patch agriculture was practised over wide areas by the tribals of Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Central Provinces, Hyderabad and Madras till 30 to 40 years back. It has survived still in Assam, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Hyderabad in relic form.

Assam

Shifting cultivation under the name of *jhum* is practised all over the tribal tracts of Assam. Popular opinion imagines the Nagas as a fierce and warlike people, continuously occupied with head-hunting, human sacrifice and other exciting customs. But the reality lies on the other side. The Naga is first and foremost an agriculturist. Nine-tenths of his thoughts and his life are devoted to his fields. Dr. Christoph Von Furer-Haimendorf who made a first hand study of the tribes of Assam in 1935 describes the agriculture of the Nagas in these words, 'the Konyak's system of agriculture, with the continual shifting of yields, is

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*** Schmidt : 'The Primitive Races of Mankind' Pp. 112.**

† E.P. Stebbing : 'The Forests of West Africa and the Sahara' Pp. 3 & 49.

‡ Encylopaedia of Social Sciences, Vol. 1-2 Pp. 594.

undoubtedly of very great age. It is more primitive than that of the Augemiz, for the Konyaks know nothing of complicated terraces or artificial irrigation, and therefore expend much more time and energy in raising a smaller crop than the tribes to the south. From early autumn, when the elders decide on a particular block of land for the next year's cultivation, the entire population devotes all energies to the work on the fields. This decision is generally only a matter of form, since a definite cycle has long been established, whereby each section of the land is brought under cultivation once in every fourteen years. The clearing of the land is the work of the individual families, the old men and women cutting down the undergrowth with their *dao*, and the young men felling the trees. Only a few are left standing, so that the jungle may regenerate quickly, once the period of cultivation is over. Then, after the felled jungle has been left to dry for several weeks, it is burnt, and in January and February you can see smoke and lines of fire on all the slopes, slowly eating their way up through the thicket. The Konyak uses no animal manure, but the ashes from burning jungle provide a valuable fertiliser."* The Konyak does not perform any rites or ceremonies till the sowing begins. But when the seed is intrusted to the earth where hundreds of dangers may threaten the crops, the Konyak turns to the gods, and solicit protection with offerings and prayers. At the first ceremonial sowing the village founder sacrifices a chicken on one of his fields on behalf of the whole village and addresses, the Sky-god Gawang. 'Let there be many blossoms this year ; be gracious, O Gawang. Give us rice, give us millet, O Gawang.'

Another tribe of Assam, Sema Naga, follow *jhumming* pure and simple. The cleared plot is used for two successive seasons and thereafter left fallow to recuperate for ten to twelve years. Dr. J.H. Hutton writes of Sema custom, 'In *jhumming* the Semas do not, as some tribes do, first burn and then clear, but they clear the land, cutting down many of the trees, and then burn, afterwards cutting down the burnt trunks of the remaining trees, and then clearing up the fields and digging the ashes into the soil. Neither do they all imitate, at any rate to the same extent, the excellent Lhota practice of stripping the trees of all their branches and leaving a bunch of green leaf at the top so that the tree does not die, but branches out again when the two year's cultivation is finished. On the contrary, many of them cut the trees down and burn them entirely.'†

The Lakher also raise their crops on *jhum* system. Since the hills are very steep and there is general scarcity of water, terraced or wet cultivation is not possible. Geographical conditions have left only one alternative for the tribe, that is shifting cultivation. Every year the Lakher clear a virgin plot and fire its undergrowth—bigger logs are used for fencing the plot. After the harvest is over, they leave the burnt plot fallow for eight or ten years. During this period there is regrowth and again the old patch is brought into cultivation. Where the population is denser, a second crop may be raised on the same plot as in some parts of the Lushai Hills. The hill dwellers of Assam still practise *jhumming* with some variation and millions among them depend on this system for their food supply. The Mikirs—a primitive agricultural tribe of Mikir Hills-numbering about 1,29,797 also carry on shifting cultivation*.

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* Christoph Von Furer Haimendorf : 'The Naked Nagas' Pp. 79-81.

† J.H. Hutton : 'The Sema Nagas', Pp. 60.

Orissa

The Juangs of Orissa, numbering about seventeen thousand, practised axe-cultivation till very recently. There are no paddy fields worth the name in the Juangpirh. The tribesmen do not know digging out, damming or terracing the fields. They carry on cultivation only on the slopes of the hills after clearing them. Very few of them own ploughs. They lived mostly on axe-cultivation. But in Pal Lahara and Dhenkanal, forests have been reserved and they are no longer permitted to carry on shifting cultivation. Some attempts were made by the Forest Department in Pal Lahara to colonise the Juangs and wean them from axe-cultivation. About twenty three families were brought four years ago and were given some lands in the plains. But most of them had gradually left the new site and only four families remain who are not happy over the change. Another experiment was made on more elaborate scale with a colony of forty houses with better sanitation and facilities for education and recreation. But so far the administration has failed to persuade any of the juangs to go and stay in that colony.†

The Bhuiya tribe of Orissa is another example of shifting cultivators. Dr. S.C. Roy found the Bhuiya practising two kinds of shifting culture. 'In the *dahi* method, they clear more or less a level patch on a hill slope. All the trees are cut down and piled one upon another in rows. Bushes and Shrubs are also cut and piled about them. When they are dry, they are fired, the land is dug up, and upland rice is planted. By the Koman process all bushes and shrubs are cut and placed in heaps round the trees. After a month or two they are fired. The fires destroy the branches and twigs of trees, leaving only the scorched and baked trunks. The ashes are then spread all over the Koman. In one part, upland rice is sown and elsewhere other crops. Beans are sown round the tree trunks and allowed to climb up them.'*

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* A.V. Thakkar : 'Tribes of India' Part I, pp. 17.

† Shri A.P. Vyas (Honorary Tribal and Rural Welfare Officer, Orissa Government) article in 'Tribes of India' pp. 177-78.

The Godhas in Koraput district of Orissa practise axe cultivation on the hill slopes and they shift cultivation from one hill slope to another as soon as productivity of the former is reduced considerably. Their total number in Orissa is 34,315 according to 1931 census. Their vocation is mostly agriculture although they are good hunters and gatherers of wild fruits and roots.† Another tribe the Khonds numbering about seven lacs subsist on *podu* cultivation, forest produce and hunting. Hardly one-third of them have taken to plough cultivation so far.‡ The Koyas in the district of Koraput also eke out their livelihood from shifting cultivation on the borders of the Godavari district.** Bondo Porojas, the most primitive amongst the hill tribes of Orissa, (nearly five thousand in number) live on hill tops and every year burn forests for their shifting cultivation. They cultivate Mandia or Ragi and some times paddy too in the valleys nearby.††

Madhya Pradesh

Shifting cultivation was carried on over wide areas in the Central Provinces until it was stopped by a Government order in 1867. Among the important tribes associated with this system of cultivation were : Korkus in Betul, Melghat and the Jagiras of Chhindwara and Hoshangabad ; Baigas in Mandla, Balaghat, Northern Drug and Bilaspur ; Kamars in South Raipur; Korwas in Bilaspur and the Maria in the Chanda and Drug Zamindaris. Among the merged States Kawardha and Bastar also permitted Bewar to the Baiga and Maria Gonds respectively in their jurisdiction. The bordering State of Rewa also allowed its Baigas to clear forest patches without any restriction as long as they paid the prescribed taxes to the State.‡‡ The system of shifting cultivation was practically the same in all these areas of Central Provinces, with certain variations in accordance with the kind of local soil or forest growth. Bewar, of the Baiga, which is discussed in detail elsewhere, represented the main characteristics of shifting cultivation in this State.

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* Verrier Elwin, op. cit., Pp. 105-6. Also S C. Roy : "The Hill Bhuiyas of Orissa' Pp 69

† Shri Rajkrishna Bose's article in 'Tribes of India' Part I Pp 173.

‡ Shri A. Vyas (Tribal Welfare Officer, Orissa Govt.), Ibid, Pp. 176.

** Shri L N. Sahu's article, Ibid., Pp 184.

†† Shri L.N. Sahu's article, Ibid. Pp 193.

‡‡ Report of the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture (Main Report 1928) Pp. 268.
W.V. Grigson : 'The Aboriginal Problem in Central Provinces & Berar', Pp. 344.
W.V. Grigson : "The Maria Gonds of Bastar', Pp. 125-136.

Hyderabad

Shifting cultivation provides food to millions of primitive people in the tribal tracts of Hyderabad. The Reddis have been traditionally practising *podu* since times immemorial. Dr. Christoph Von Furer Haimendorf, who studied the life and problems of the tribals of Hyderabad has described the Reddis' system of *podu.* 'They burn jungle on hill-slopes and then cultivate the land for two or three years, after which period they allow it to revert to jungle; indeed all the hilly parts of the country are unsuitable for any other kind of agriculture. Though for centuries the Reddis have practised shifting cultivation in their present habitat there are remarkably few signs of permanent deforestation ; since the Reddis leave pollarded tree stumps in their *podu* fields and these sprout even during the period of cultivation, there is little danger of erosion as long as the slopes are permitted sufficient time in which to recuperate'.* Besides the Reddis who are spread over a vast area in the State, other tribes also practise shifting cultivation including Koyas of the Samashtham of Paloncha and the Talugs of Paloncha and Yellandu in Warangal District, Kolams and Naikpods of Asifabad, Rajura and Utnur Talugs in Adilabad District.†

Madras

Podu cultivation was very common among the tribes of Madras before the Government took over the management of forests from private owners. It fits in well with the primitive economy. For burning down a part of the forest and then hoeing and broadcasting the seeds in the soil fertilised by the ashes, requires very little capital and fairly good crops can be raised. The Godavari valley, from where the Indravati joins it to the apex of the delay, is the Koyaland, an area approximately of 3,676 square miles. The Koyas do extensive *podu* and a bit of wet cultivation. The Koya do not cultivate *podu* more than for his requirements. He does not do it as a business proposition, *i.e.*, to raise paddy or *cholam* for sale. The acreage under *podu* in the Koyaland is about 4,000 acres and remains the same more or less year after year.‡ The

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* Christoph Von Furer-Haimendorf : 'The Tribal Hyderabad', Pp. 2—5.

† Christoph Von Furer-Haimendorf : 'The Aboriginal Tribes of Hyderabad' Pp. 77-89.

‡ A. Aiyyappan : "Report on the Socio-Economic conditions of the Aboriginal Tribes of the Province of Madras", Pp 62.

Hill Reddis do extensive *podu* cultivation. No doubt, a good number of them own land and cattle. Unlike the Savaras, they use plough for *podu* cultivation. The Godhas, mainly concentrated in Jeypore, Malkangiri, Koraput, Potangi taluks, practise shifting cultivation with iron handle-holed hoes on the hill fields. They do not, however, shift their villages unless compelled by the most dire necessity. The Bagatas numbering about fifty thousand indulge in *podu* or shifting cultivation—the favourite crop being *ragi*. Only a few in the Lower Agency use the plough, other using the pick-axes to turn the soil. The Savaras who chiefly in-habit the Salur, Parvatipur and Palakonda taluqas of Vizagapatam district (numbering 7,856) raise crops on *podu* system. Nearly 70 per cent of the Kummaries (about 4,000 in all) are cultivators doing both *podu* and wet cultivation. The Porjas who live by the side of Bagatas in the Vizagapatam and plains have both shifting cultivation and permanent rice fields, but all of them do not have wet lands. The Dombos, an untouchable caste, found in Vizagapatam agency are mainly cultivators and they do *podu*. On the Nilgiris Plateau, Kurichiyas and other agricultural tribes carry on shifting cultivation, known as Punam cultivation in Waynaad. Among other tribes following Punam are Mulla Kurumbas, Karimpolaus, Kaders, Jen Kurumbars, Kurumbar.*

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* A. Aiyyappan : , Ibid.

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